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[*For critical comments see back pages of this volume*]

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POSSESSION

WITH

THE GROOVE, THE UNBORN, CIRCLES,
A GOOD WOMAN, THE BLACK TIE

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF CONTEMPORARY LIFE

BY

GEORGE MIDDLETON
Author of *Embers*, *Tradition*, *Nowadays*, etc.

". . . . . these women are.
More brain, O Lord, more brain! or we shall mar
Utterly this fair garden we might win."
Modern Love.

25427

NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY
1915

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Published January, 1915

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PS
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1915

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RAHWAY, N. J.

To my good friend
RALPH CURTIS RINGWALT

PREFACE

It is a fact that many plays which aim at a serious presentation of life are denied a hearing solely because the manager—necessarily commercial—has learned from experience that the theater in America has not been able as yet so to organize its audiences that such plays will be as liberally supported as kaleidoscopic comedies and lithographic melodramas. The dramatist, therefore, who prefers to follow the impulse within him, irrespective of whether or not his play may have a wide popular appeal, has had little encouragement. This is obviously so where his subjects are quietly intimate and where the clash of character is subtly mental or emotional; especially when one compares such plays with those others, no more dramatic in essence, which naturally command a greater audience because the action is physical, external, and more readily comprehended.

If he be honest enough, however, to recognize frankly the many reasons why conditions are as they are, he need not bewail what may be only a transitional state of affairs. He will pursue his work for the joy it will bring him: he will not compromise with what vision and art he may possess. By doing this he will at least achieve his own self-expression—which should be of prime importance to him; and he will not lose his pro-

portion by coddling himself with self-pity over the neglect of the larger public.

Speaking for such workers I have suggested in my preface to NOWADAYS the value of play publication: not as a substitute for production but as an alternative for those whose dramas may offer little attraction to the manager because of theme or treatment. Through publication the dramatist thus gains a certain audience otherwise denied him, and time, too, may bring him the production which each play must have to make it a vital living expression. It has been this thought—which contains no criticism of the many excellent plays that win an easy way to the footlights—as well as the limited opportunities afforded the one-act play in America, which has impelled me to offer another volume to a reading public already generous to my earlier efforts.

POSSESSION continues my series of one-act plays begun in EMBERS and TRADITION. In it I have sought once more to depict intimate phases of modern character expressing itself on contending planes of evolution. As Spinoza points out, one should look at all the motives of human feeling which drive people into action, not as vices of human nature, but as properties belonging to it, just as cold and heat belong to the air. To reflect these motives, with a sympathy which does not sentimentalize them, should be, in my opinion, the highest aim of the dramatist, who through the moving quality of his medium may thus in turn broaden a little the human sympathies of the beholder. With this idea in the background these plays, in the main, are studies

in marriage and family relations, having the emphasis on woman—blindly groping or clear visioned, as the case may be—about whom to-day the conflict of social traditions with growing individualism is centered.

G. M.

October 29, 1914.

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POSSESSION

THE PEOPLE

HOWARD BANNING, *a prominent financier.*
KATRINE, *his divorced wife.*
POLLY, *their daughter.*
ANNE, *an old family nurse.*
JOHN, *the butler.*

SCENE

The entrance hallway in BANNING'S *home, New York City. Late one March afternoon.*

POSSESSION *

AS the curtain slowly rises the broad entrance hallway of a luxuriously appointed residence is disclosed.

The porch without is faintly seen through the wide door whose beveled glass panel is covered with fine lace. Directly opposite this street entrance the broad stairway mounts to the floors above. In back, a short section of the wall, on which is an imposing bronze-shield clock, divides the open spaces of two handsomely decorated rooms that extend beyond: the one at the left is obviously a reception-room; the other, partly hidden by the stairway, is the dining-room. In the niche, made by the stairs and the wall at the right, a cozy corner is visible in which is tucked a small settee accessible to the 'phone on a low table. The hallway itself is of the finest paneled wood, here and there supporting electric clusters now unlighted. It is, of course, simply furnished, though there are several long low attractively carved chests which stand against the visible and invisible walls. These are cushioned in tone to match the soft Oriental rugs on the hardwood floor. The entire impression is of studied simplicity made possible by great means.

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Though it is late afternoon—the hands of the clock, in fact, indicate a quarter to five—the sun still pours in sufficiently through the glass door and the windows suggested in the extreme rear to light the hallway.

For some moments no one is seen. Then POLLY *comes from the dining-room, looking for her "Alice in Wonderland."*

POLLY *is about six or seven. She is dressed in a neat frock and her hair is tied with a ribbon which sets off her thoughtful face. She is rather a winsome body, with a quaint attractive charm all her own.*

She finds the book on one of the chests and slowly goes up the stairs looking at the pictures. Then she is no longer seen.

A few seconds after this, the figure of a woman is indistinctly observed outside trying to look in through the street door. She hesitates a moment; then a key is heard slowly turning in the lock. She opens the door almost stealthily and stands there. She absently pushes the door to as though fearing one might see her and, not knowing what to do with the key, places it in her handbag. It is KATRINE BANNING.

KATRINE *is about thirty. The thin outlines of her delicate face quickly reveal a woman of natural refinement and her general manner indicates assured social position. At present her large deep eyes are narrowed with suppressed excitement, her frail body quivers with alert attention; she seems tuned to a purpose. One intuitively gains a sense that she is not naturally self-willed, but has been made so by overwhelming circumstance—a woman determined but unused to the per-*

vading emotion which is now impelling her life. She is quietly gowned.

She gains control of herself, and after looking about the room for a moment as though it recalled many things, her eyes finally rest on the stairs. She slowly moves toward them—hesitating, gaining courage, and finally confident. As she is about to ascend them, however, the telephone sharply rings. She quivers. Instinctively she retreats into the reception-room as she hears the outer dining-room door open and close. With a quick glance in that direction, she conceals herself in back as JOHN, *the butler, in conventional garb, enters from the dining-room. As he goes to the 'phone* KATRINE *steps out and listens, though she cannot be seen by the butler because of the intervening stairs.*

JOHN

(*At the 'phone*)

Hello? . . . This is John. . . . Beg pardon, Mr. Banning; at half-past five? . . . (KATRINE *starts and quickly glances at the clock.*) Very good, sir. Early dinner . . . I'll tell cook . . . Yes, sir . . . Anne has just brought Miss Polly in. . . . She's upstairs. . . . Very good, sir.

(JOHN *hangs up the receiver. He is about to go when he notices a draught and looks at the street door, which, during this, has blown open. As he crosses to close it* KATRINE *again retreats out of sight.* JOHN *becomes somewhat suspicious, but closes the door and then crosses into the dining-room.* KATRINE, *thinking he has*

gone, comes out and starts quickly toward the stairs. JOHN *steps out, also, in front of her. He is civil but suspicious throughout.*)

JOHN

I beg pardon. Do you wish to see Mr. Banning?

KATRINE

You don't know me?

JOHN

No, ma'am.

KATRINE

Oh, yes; you're new here.

JOHN

Some months.

KATRINE

That explains it.

JOHN

(*As she again starts to go up*)

I beg pardon; perhaps you've got the wrong house.

KATRINE

(*Cynically*)

The wrong house?

JOHN

(*Firmly*)

Mr. Banning's very particular and I must be——

KATRINE

(*Realizing his suspicions*)

—careful? Yes. One must be careful these days.

JOHN

Will you leave a card?

KATRINE

You might call Anne.

JOHN

(*Surprised*)

You know Anne?

KATRINE

(*Pointing to the push-button*)

Press the button three times. It's her call, I believe. Then stay here till she comes.

JOHN

(*Doing so, puzzled*)

I beg pardon if I've made a mistake.

KATRINE

You are quite right to be careful—with a child upstairs.

JOHN

Thank you.

KATRINE

I forgot I was a stranger here. (*She begins to laugh nervously, much to his amazement.*) Me—a stranger here!

JOHN

I beg pardon, but——

KATRINE

I told you, you did quite right.

JOHN

(*Points to reception-room*)

Won't you wait in there?

KATRINE

(*Abruptly*)

Is that clock right?

JOHN

A trifle slow.

KATRINE

Oh, yes; it never was on time.

(*As she begins laughing again nervously,* ANNE *enters in back, completely astonished on seeing* KATRINE.

ANNE *is about sixty, with white hair and a kind face. She is dressed in black with a white frilled cap.*)

ANNE

Miss Katie!

KATRINE

Anne.

ANNE

Oh, good Lord! It's Miss Katie herself!

KATRINE

Mr. Banning's new butler thought me a thief.

ANNE

A thief?

KATRINE

Isn't it ridiculous?

JOHN

I beg pardon, but the front door was open and no one——

KATRINE

(*Impatiently*)

Tell him, Anne. So he'll know me if I call again.

ANNE

It's *Mrs.* Banning!

JOHN

(*Astonished*)

Mrs. Banning! Oh, I beg pardon. (*Recovering himself.*) Mr. Banning will be here himself at half-past five.

KATRINE
(*Glancing at the clock*)
Yes, I know. I heard you.

(ANNE *motions* JOHN *to go. He leaves quietly in back; then* ANNE, *her manner changed to one of extreme solicitude, goes to* KATRINE, *who is seated on the chest laughing nervously.*)

ANNE
You'll have hysterics.

KATRINE
(*Bitterly*)
Think of a mother having to *steal* into the house to see her own child!

ANNE
Hush! Hush! He frightened you.

KATRINE
(*Controlling herself*)
I haven't given way like this once—since it all happened.

ANNE
(*Quieting her in a motherly fashion*)
There now, Miss Katie.

KATRINE
I'm all right now.

ANNE

Yes, yes——

KATRINE

I thought Polly might be alone; or only with you. I didn't want any one else to see me. I had my old key. She's upstairs?

ANNE

(*Hesitating*)

Yes.

KATRINE

(*Looking at the clock again*)

Then I can see her, before Mr. Banning comes.

ANNE

(*Glancing quickly up toward the stairs, fearing* POLLY *may hear*)

Is it *best* to see her now?

KATRINE

Anne! She's not getting used to my being away from her?

ANNE

It wasn't easy for her at first; but Mr. Banning told her——

KATRINE

(*Sharply*)

What did he tell her? Say it, Anne.

ANNE

That you'd gone away on a long trip, and wouldn't be back for a long time.

KATRINE

Did he say anything unkind about me?

ANNE

I never hear him speak about you.

KATRINE

Then you think Polly doesn't know what has happened?

ANNE

Ah, Miss Katie; she's not old enough to understand such things.

KATRINE

(*Starting toward the stairs*)

I must go to her if only for a few moments.

ANNE

(*Half stopping her*)

Miss Katie——

KATRINE

You stop me, too?

ANNE

It's breaking my old heart, Miss Katie, to see you taking on like this; but she'll tell Mr. Banning and he gave me particular orders——

KATRINE
(*Abruptly*)
To shut me out?

ANNE
(*Lowering her head*)
He might send me away.

KATRINE
Oh, yes—yes.
(*She sits again, slowly, as though overcome with perplexity.*)

ANNE
Mr. Banning is so changeable-like these last months. There's no telling what he'll do.

KATRINE
She mustn't lose you.

ANNE
He says she needs a woman about and that he's trusting her to *me* now.

KATRINE
To you? Yes (*Half breaking*)—and my arms are empty.

ANNE
He never smiles; even when he's loving her.

KATRINE

He loves her? Does he really love her?

ANNE

(*Slowly*)

Yes. If you'll pardon me, Miss Katie, it seems as though you both love her more since this took place.

KATRINE

We both love her: yet the courts gave her to him. (*Dully*) They couldn't understand.

ANNE

(*With a sigh*)

If people don't understand us and they're stronger, there's nothing to do but give in to them.

KATRINE

(*Rising impulsively*)

But I have not given in!

ANNE

Don't we all have to in the end?

KATRINE

(*With a certain imperative firmness*)

No: not inside—not in our hearts and souls. I'm her mother: she's my girl. I'm wasting time.

ANNE

You're going to see her?

KATRINE

Upstairs or here.

ANNE

But if Mr. Banning should find out?

KATRINE

He'll never know I saw you. You won't be blamed. Send her down here for a book or something. Do as I tell you. (*Clutching* ANNE'S *arm fiercely.*) Anne, you've known me ever since I was her age. Do *you* think I am not even fit to see her?

ANNE

No, no, Miss Katie. Only I can't believe it's all true—when everything was so nice and comfortable here for you. I can't believe it's true.

(ANNE *goes upstairs shaking her head.*)

KATRINE

(*Half to herself, surveying the room slowly*)

Everything so nice here! (*She goes quickly to the door, after glancing at the clock which is now pointing to five.*) A half hour. (*A thought strikes her and she goes, with suppressed excitement, to the 'phone.*) Hello? Plaza 4433. (*She waits nervously.*) Yes, Sheldon's? . . . Send me a taxi at once. . . . Banning. . . . Yes . . . 34 Park. . . . At once . . . I am waiting.

(*As she is 'phoning,* POLLY *comes slowly down the stairs, not knowing who is talking. Finally*

when she reaches the bottom she and her mother recognize each other.)

KATRINE

Polly!

POLLY

(*Rushing eagerly to her arms*)

Mama! Mama!

(KATRINE *hugs and kisses her repeatedly for some moments as though words could not break through her inarticulate emotion.*)

KATRINE

Polly! My little girl! . . . Dearest!

POLLY

You've come back?

KATRINE

Yes, yes.

POLLY

I'm so—so glad! Don't cry, mama.

KATRINE

I can't help it, dearest. Ah, you look so well, so pretty. You've grown, my darling——

POLLY

I'm so glad you're home again. (KATRINE *looks*

down, trying to keep back the tears.) Did you have a nice trip?

KATRINE

Oh!

POLLY

Where have you been?

KATRINE

(*Controlling herself*)

I've been far away. Didn't your father tell you?

POLLY

Papa said he'd tell me all about it some day. But why didn't *you* come to tell me about it before you went away? And you didn't kiss me good-by.

KATRINE

I did kiss you good-by, child. But you were asleep.

POLLY

Why didn't you wake me up?

KATRINE

It's best sometimes not to waken happy children.

POLLY

But you've come back to stay with us now?

KATRINE
(*Evasively*)

You've missed me?

POLLY

Yes. I've been so lonesome.

KATRINE

But you had your father.

POLLY
(*With childish mirth*)

Oh, yes; and he's such fun these days. He said he must be papa and mama to me while you're away. He plays with me every time I ask him now. He was always "too busy" before. We sailed boats in the bath-tub yesterday and he got his coat all wet. Will you sail boats with me?

KATRINE

Yes.

POLLY

Papa says he's going to take me on a real boat soon.

KATRINE

A real boat?

POLLY

Yes. A boat that goes over the ocean.

KATRINE

(*Half terrified*)

He's going to take you over the ocean?

POLLY

Yes. When Spring comes. And we're going to stay a long, long while. I told Anne, maybe we were going over to find you. But now you've come back, we can all go together. (*Happily*) Won't it be fun?

KATRINE

(*Nonplussed*)

Next month!

POLLY

I'm getting all my things. Anne's having them made for me. And I've got a red hat with a long feather. Come, see it.

(*Taking her hand and trying to drag her to the stairs*)

KATRINE

(*Holding her close again*)

He sha'n't take you; he sha'n't.

POLLY

But, mama, I want to go.

KATRINE

You want to go?

POLLY

Oh! it will be so wonderful. Aren't *you* glad we'll all go together?

KATRINE

(*Drawing her close with suppressed excitement*)
Polly, you do love me, don't you?

POLLY

Heaps and heaps.

KATRINE

But you love me more than any one else?

POLLY

More than any one—except papa and Anne.

KATRINE

(*Impulsively*)
I can't let you go. (*Glancing quickly at the clock, which has moved on.*) Polly! Would you like to take a ride in a taxi with me? Just you and me? So we may talk?

POLLY

Won't you wait for papa? Then we can go in his car. He'll be so glad to see you.

KATRINE

But I want a long talk with you first. Won't you come?

POLLY
(*Eagerly*)

I'll ask Anne if I can go.

KATRINE
(*Hurt*)

There's no need of asking Anne, if your *mother* wants you.

POLLY
(*Hesitating*)

But papa said I must always ask her. He says there are bad people about who want to steal pretty little girls like me.

KATRINE
(*Coaxing her*)

I know. But this will be a secret, a secret between you and me.

POLLY
(*Entering into the spirit of it*)

A *real* secret for nobody but us?

KATRINE

Yes.

POLLY

Goodie.

KATRINE

Get your coat—your warm coat. And don't let Anne see you or she'll guess our secret.

POLLY

My coat is in the play-room, 'way upstairs.

KATRINE

Go the back stairs. Hurry. It's getting late.

POLLY

It's so exciting.

KATRINE

(*As* POLLY *comically tiptoes off in back through the dining-room* KATRINE *holds her arms out after her*)

Dare I? You're my child, too; and he's taking you——

(*As* BANNING *opens the door and enters* KATRINE *turns. He throws his coat and hat down on the chair. They eye each other: he in quiet resentment and astonishment at her presence; she with a certain subdued nervousness and fear, lest* POLLY *should immediately return.*

HOWARD BANNING *has already passed forty, though the slight tinge of gray about the temples and the lines of his face, deepened as they have been by great responsibilities, suggest he is older. His physique, however, reveals power controlled by a will which is indicated in his firmly set features. His manner toward* KATRINE *is one of assumed coldness, though the bitterness and attempted consideration betray deeply stirred feelings underneath—feel-*

ings which always sway him in spite of his severe schooling in life.)

BANNING
(*Coldly*)
What are you doing here?

KATRINE
(*Controlling herself*)
I came to see Polly.

BANNING
The courts have decided that question.

KATRINE
I ask five minutes alone with her.

BANNING
(*Refusing it*)
I am sorry.

KATRINE
Just five minutes. (*He is silent.*) She was born upstairs. Doesn't all the pain I went through entitle me to five minutes—five minutes that you'd give a *stranger* who wished to speak to her on the streets?

BANNING
You could have remained something else.

KATRINE
I'm still her mother.

BANNING

You have forfeited any rights here.

KATRINE

But not the right to feel.

BANNING

That is your punishment.

KATRINE

Oh, yes: you still believe in punishment.

BANNING

When one deserves it.

KATRINE

(*As she gazes at him sadly*)

And you dared to judge me!

BANNING

You offered no defense in court.

KATRINE

Before the law? No. I had none to give—*there.*

BANNING

(*Bitterly*)

You were her mother. You should have thought of the consequences before you and Mace——

KATRINE
(*Quickly*)
But it was not the *mother* in me that he caught.

BANNING
(*Sarcastically*)
No: it was my wife.

KATRINE
(*Simply*)
In her loose moments; yes.

BANNING
Can you say it without shame?

KATRINE
Yes: I have understanding of myself now.

BANNING
And that means justification, I suppose?

KATRINE
I said understanding. Can't *you* understand my suffering and give me just five minutes with Polly?

BANNING
(*Violently clutching her arms*)
Katrine, why did you do this to me? (*As he loses control of himself.*) Why did you make a fool of me? Why did you deceive me? Answer! Katrine!

KATRINE
(*Coldly*)

Please take your hands from me. You forget I am no longer your wife.

(*They stare at each other a moment: then his hands slip down her arms and he turns away. She looks at him and then nervously toward the dining-room door where she expects* POLLY.

JOHN *enters from there as* KATRINE *eyes him with quick apprehension.*)

JOHN

I beg pardon, Mr. Banning: your taxi is here.

KATRINE
(*Involuntarily*)

Ah!

BANNING

A taxi? What would I want with a taxi?

JOHN
(*Surprised*)

He said you 'phoned you were in a hurry.

BANNING

I didn't order any——

KATRINE

I ordered it.

BANNING

(*Without suspicion*)

Then say Mrs. Banning will be there in a moment.

(*They wait till* JOHN *goes out through the dining-room.* BANNING *steps quietly before* KATRINE *as she now makes a move toward the stairs.*)

Do you completely forget what has happened?

KATRINE

Could I?

BANNING

Then does your "understanding" include me? Do you understand what you did to me?

KATRINE

Yes, yes.

BANNING

(*Reproachfully.*)

You deceived me, Katrine.

KATRINE

Let me go. It is only Polly's mother who is standing here.

BANNING

(*Stopping her*)

You should not have forgotten you were a mother. (*Firmly*) Now, please go. I don't want you to

see her. It's not easy, I know. I'm sorry. But you need have no fear for Polly. Since she can't have a mother, she will have everything——

KATRINE

—everything a father can give. I had all a husband could give—at least, everything he thought I should have. But one thing was wrong from the start between us: it's why I am afraid to have her grow up here alone with you and away from me.

BANNING

(*Icily*)

And what, pray, is that?

KATRINE

It's your attitude toward women, Howard. You must change that before you hurt her, as you did me.

(POLLY, *with her hat and coat on, comes running in excitedly from the dining-room.*)

POLLY

I'm ready, mother. Anne didn't hear me. (*She sees* BANNING.) Oh, papa, you've come home, too.

BANNING

(*Stunned*)

Then you *have* seen Polly?

KATRINE

(*Hugging* POLLY)

Yes.

BANNING

So!

POLLY

(*Happily*)

Isn't it just lovely, papa, to have mama back again to stay? I told him that you'd come back, mama. Oh, we both missed her so; didn't we, papa?

KATRINE

Polly!

POLLY

It's been so lonely here except when papa plays with me. Oh, I'm so happy now. (*Kisses her.*) Aren't you happy, papa, that mama's come home?

BANNING

Home! You see, Katrine, what it is?

KATRINE

But you at least have had her all this time.

POLLY

(*Whispering to her*)

Shall we tell papa our secret and only keep it from Anne?

KATRINE

(*Silencing her*)

Hush!

(*Pleading with* BANNING, *who gazes at them*) Just five minutes alone with her, Howard.

(*There is a tense pause.* POLLY *looks from*

one to the other, not understanding. Finally BANNING *seems to give a silent consent. He turns to go up the stairs.*)

POLLY

(*Pouting*)

Can't we take papa along in the taxi with us?

BANNING

(*Turning sharply*)

Katrine!

KATRINE

(*Defensively*)

The child meant——

BANNING

(*Taking* POLLY *quickly from her mother*)

The taxi. I see.

KATRINE

No!

BANNING

I might have known!

KATRINE

(*Defiantly*)

Well, why not?

BANNING

Why not? Going to *steal* her away from me, eh?

KATRINE

She's my child, too.

(BANNING *laughs harshly.*)

POLLY

(*As she looks from one to the other without understanding*)

Why, nobody's going to steal me, papa. I'm only going with mama for a ride.

BANNING

(*Calling up the stairs*)

Anne! Anne! Come here!

KATRINE

(*Appealingly*)

Howard!

POLLY

What's the matter?

BANNING

(*Brutally*)

Your mother has no right to be here.

KATRINE

Let *me* tell her!

BANNING

Not now.

KATRINE
(*Distracted*)
Polly, come to me, dear.

BANNING
You stay here.
(ANNE *enters quickly down the stairs, and realizes the situation.* BANNING *immediately controls himself before her.*)

BANNING
Anne; take Polly to her room.

ANNE
Yes, sir.

KATRINE
(*Poignantly*)
No, no. Anne, Anne!

POLLY
I don't understand. You both want me and——

BANNING
Go with Anne, Polly. I want to talk with your mother—alone.

POLLY
(*Protesting*)
But, papa——

BANNING

That's a good girl. Now, do as I say.

KATRINE

(*Desperately throughout*)

Have you no pity, Howard?

ANNE

(*Taking* POLLY'S *hand*)

Come, dear.

KATRINE

My arms are empty, Howard—empty.

POLLY

Mama!

BANNING

Go with Anne——

KATRINE

(*Holding out her arms*)

Polly! Polly! Polly!

POLLY

But, Anne, why won't papa let me——?

(ANNE *gently leads the bewildered child off.* KATRINE *and* BANNING *both look after* POLLY. *Then* KATRINE *sinks on one of the chests, overcome. He turns to her, bitterly.*)

BANNING

You tried to trick me. (*She does not answer except with a sob.*) Katrine! You tried to trick me!

KATRINE

Yes.

BANNING

To steal her away.

KATRINE

(*Pleading*)

Only for a ride with me, at first. But when she said you were going abroad for a long while——

BANNING

Where were *you* going to take her?

KATRINE

Anywhere. I didn't know.

BANNING

To give her what?

KATRINE

A mother's love.

BANNING

Who robbed her of it?

KATRINE

I'm here to give it.

BANNING

And what else?

KATRINE

Protection, support, all.

BANNING

(*With a harsh laugh*)

You?

KATRINE

Yes: if you'll let me.

BANNING

Let you? And how are you going to do it? With Mace's money?

KATRINE

(*Her whole defensive manner changing to one of assertion*)

With my own money! I'm earning it now—working.

BANNING

Working?

KATRINE

Women do, you know.

BANNING

(*With incredulous sarcasm throughout*)

You earning money?

KATRINE
(*Abruptly facing him*)
How did you think I would live?

BANNING
I offered you money.

KATRINE
Yes: that was your one human act in all this! But I could no longer give you anything in return. Mace offered me money, too. I had nothing further to give him. There seems to be only one reason women think they can take money from men.

BANNING
So Mace lets you work?

KATRINE
(*Emphatically*)
He has nothing to do with my actions.

BANNING
(*Astonished*)
Then you're not going to marry him?

KATRINE
Why should I?

BANNING
For the sake of your name—if nothing else.

KATRINE

Who disgraced my name?

BANNING

Your own act.

KATRINE

Which you and the courts spread abroad. But does that give you both the further right to keep my child from me?

BANNING

Since you forgot what you owed your husband, every right.

KATRINE

What has her future to do with what I owed you? You divorced me, didn't you? The law no longer compels you to support me, does it? I have paid the social penalty, haven't I? What further do I owe *you?*

BANNING

You owe it to me to leave my daughter alone, so that she will forget you as I want to.

KATRINE

But my child loves me.

BANNING

Children forget—like some women.

KATRINE
(*Quickly*)

And I should want her to forget me if I were still what I was when I lived here with you. But I'll never let her forget me now—for *now* I can be a good mother to her.

BANNING

You're absurd—laughable! As if a woman like you *could* be a good mother after what has happened.

KATRINE

I can *because* of what has happened.

BANNING

It was all of your own making.

KATRINE
(*With directness*)

Are you so sure? Have you ever asked yourself inside whether it was all *my* fault? Have you, Howard?

BANNING

There's nothing to argue. I only know one miserable, rotten fact: the one fact a man never forgets.

KATRINE

Which thousands of women accept and forget in men! (*He dismisses it.*) A mother has her great fact, too: that she bore her child! Has any man ever the right to forget that?

BANNING

That doesn't excuse what you did to me.

KATRINE

No. If my fidelity was *all* you prized me for.

BANNING

(*With feeling*)

You think that was all I——?

KATRINE

It was all you considered when the test came. You thought of nothing else. You turned me out without a word. You didn't even ask for an explanation.

BANNING

(*Bitterly*)

What could you have explained?

KATRINE

Nothing then, perhaps—that's why I didn't try. For then I didn't know myself.

BANNING

But you did know I had given you everything.

KATRINE

For teas and Tangoes and Bridge and pretty gowns and jewels, yes. But what did you give me for myself?

BANNING
(*Not understanding*)
Yourself?

KATRINE
Yes, for me—*me!* To do with as *I* saw fit.

BANNING
I gave you what every man in my position wants to give his wife: leisure; comfort and leisure.

KATRINE
Yes. And it was *leisure* which ruined our life together.

BANNING
(*Laughing cynically*)
A woman ruined by leisure!

KATRINE
Leisure! Leisure! Not leisure to use as I wished, to use in something I thought worth while, in something which differed from your way of looking at life. But leisure with you always watching it, curbing it.

BANNING
Do you think I had time to bother about how you spent your days?

KATRINE

(*As he walks up and down impatiently*)

You always questioned me. You always disapproved of my actions if they differed from those of our idle women friends. You knew exactly what I should and should not do. I mustn't do this or that, for fear people would talk. Why, do you remember how you stormed because I happened to contribute to those poor garment strikers the money you had given me to waste on Bridge?

BANNING

(*Denying her words throughout*)

I told you then I couldn't have my name in the newspapers mixed up with that damn radical stuff.

KATRINE

That's it. Your name! Now we have it. (*He faces her.*) That's always what I had to consider.

BANNING

You were my wife. It was your business to consider me.

KATRINE

But did I have to make everybody think I believed the same as you? Did I have to make all my opinions only pale reflections of yours? Couldn't I be myself in what I was trying to do to escape my boredom here, without fearing everybody would criticise you? Couldn't I do or say *anything* for myself because I bore your name?

BANNING
(*Sarcastically*)

And I suppose *that* was the reason you forgot your home?

KATRINE

With servants to run it.

BANNING

You had your child.

KATRINE

Which you insisted our nurses should bring up. You didn't even want me to nurse my own child because it interfered with—(*suddenly*) Why, Howard, now that I think of it, you didn't even ask me if I wanted to have a child.

BANNING
(*Recoiling and staring at her as though he could not grasp how much she has changed*)

Katrine!

KATRINE

And what did I know of these matters when you brought me here? I didn't know anything of children. I didn't know anything of their health or care or education. Nothing. Yet I found myself a mother. The greatest thing in life. Yet I was unprepared, ignorant. And when I tried to reach out and learn, when I wanted instruction and help, when I felt I

simply had to *be* something myself before I could be anything to her—you laughed at me. (*He protests*) Oh, you meant it in kindness: you meant it *all* in kindness: that's what is so tragic!

BANNING

(*With icy incredulity*)

And you think now I should let you have Polly?

KATRINE

Yes; because I love her more than ever now, and because now I am free to learn. (*Pleading suddenly again*) Polly is only a girl, Howard; she'll be a woman soon. My heart's longing for her as she grows up, so she won't make my mistakes, be ignorant as I was when I married. For there are facts about men and women you never could tell her with your way of thinking about women. Howard, let me be part of her life every day as she grows into womanhood.

BANNING

(*Still gazing at her incredulously*)

But you don't seem to realize what you *are!*

KATRINE

Yes, I do. But what *was* I? Do *you* realize that? (*He is silent.*) What was there for me, here? A few hours with you. What for? Theaters, opera—(*With sincerity*) Howard, what was my life here?

BANNING

Just what you made it.

KATRINE

What you made me make it: an empty shell of a life on silk cushions, bored—bored, depressed, careless, and useless. You gave me leisure and I made the most of it.

BANNING

With Mace!

KATRINE

(*Wearily*)

Oh; it might have been anybody.

BANNING

(*With bitterness*)

And you think a woman who can say that is *fit* to bring up a young girl?

KATRINE

(*Persuasively, with deep feeling*)

Why not? Because I'm not full of remorse, weeping away what little strength I have in regrets? Because I'm looking forward, not back? Because I'm using what happened in the past to lead my future into something better? Has my one fault—miserable, despicable, anything the world may call it—has it torn out my mother's heart? Haven't you seen it breaking here? Do you think I'd have come back here after all you put me through, if my motherhood weren't still alive? Can your courts and your laws and all the sins of the world stamp out that feeling? Can you crush out all the good in me, because I've been guilty of my one wrong to you? Can you judge me as I

stand here, with my eyes open to life for the first time, by that—only that—and nothing else?

BANNING

(*Who has been moved by her words*)

God, Katrine! Don't I know you love our child!

KATRINE

Then let me have her.

BANNING

You love her: but so do I.

KATRINE

I know: I know.

BANNING

(*Poignantly*)

If—if it were only to somebody else you were pleading! But you wronged me—*me*. Your husband! I can't get that out of the way. I can't forget it.—You're pleading for yourself. But what about *me?* Because you want her, does that bring back the home that is broken up?

KATRINE

Was it a home?

BANNING

Must *I* lose her, too, because you're a woman? Are you going to play on that weakness to gain your end?

KATRINE

We fight with what weapons you men leave us.

BANNING

You deceived me. You steal into the house now like a thief. You try to trick me: yet you stand there justifying yourself and your rotten wrong to me, because you *bore* her. Can't a man love his child, too?

KATRINE

Doesn't that make you understand my love?

BANNING

(*Bitterly throughout*)

But why should I give her up? Why should I let her go with you? What about me? What is there here for me? She's all there is now. Am I going to let you push me aside because you're a mother? Any woman can be a mother! You talk as though it was something unusual. You think you bear the whole responsibilities of a child. You think the father's just a——. Why should I pay for all the wreckage that you brought about just because Nature happened to make you as it did?

KATRINE

Am I not paying it, too?

BANNING

(*Persistently*)

But how are you going to square the account with me?

KATRINE

Was I alone to blame for our failure?

BANNING

Answer me.

KATRINE

(*Insistingly*)

Was all the fault mine?

BANNING

You're evading my question.

KATRINE

I want your answer.

BANNING

(*Trying to put conviction in his words*)

Yes; the fault was all yours.

KATRINE

Howard! If I'd been happy here, would we have gone on the rocks? Could any woman have come to this alone?

BANNING

If you'd been a stronger woman——

KATRINE

(*Quickly*)

Grant my weakness, then; grant everything I *was*. Shouldn't you have helped me and strengthened me?

BANNING
(*Confused*)

But——

KATRINE
(*Searchingly*)

Howard! Howard! Was all the fault mine?

BANNING
(*He is halted by her tone: he seems to question himself for a moment, then he waves it aside*)

What difference does it make who's to blame when a thing's done? Why talk of blame at this late day, in the face of all this wreckage and waste?

KATRINE
(*Quickly*)

Wreckage—yes; but whether it is to be waste or not rests with us. (*He looks at her.*) Howard, there *is* good in this—if only you will see it.

BANNING

Good? Here in this empty house?

KATRINE

Yes; for you and me.

BANNING

There can be nothing between you and me.

KATRINE

There is always Polly!

BANNING

Polly!

KATRINE

Look how much more we both have to give her now?

BANNING

Living apart?

KATRINE

(*With vision*)

Yes: even that way. It's not as it should be, of course: but we must build out of the wreckage as best we may; and you and I have built better apart than we did together. Don't you see how we can go on building for Polly? That's where she, too, will gain by all this—if *we* wish it.

BANNING

(*Wearily*)

I can see no gain.

KATRINE

But you *can* see what you call my sin has not broken me: you can see I've grown really to love her through my need, through my anxiety for her future, through everything. Isn't Anne right? Haven't we *both* grown to love Polly more since this happened?

BANNING

Anne dared?

KATRINE

But isn't she right? Was either of us a good parent before? What was there in our lives worth handing on to Polly? (*He starts to answer.*) What? Here we were: two people: you with your money-making and me with my leisure. Did either of us give her love?

BANNING

What *I* gave was love.

KATRINE

Like it is now? (*Smiling.*) Now you play at sailing boats in the bath-tub—and you got your coat wet!

BANNING

(*Moved*)

She told you that?

KATRINE

Yes. You never played with her before. Polly noticed it.

BANNING

(*Almost inaudibly*)

Poor little kid.

KATRINE

Howard, that is the good in all this, if we will admit it. Her love didn't hold either of us to very

much before—did it? And now we are both stronger through our suffering. Yes; better for ourselves—and Polly. (*She comes close to him.*) Our marriage is over. It was a failure. But we're still her father and mother. Must we be enemies fighting over the possession of our child? Can't we be friends for her sake?

BANNING

Friends? You and me? With this wrong between us?

KATRINE

The wrong was between husband and wife. Polly stands between father and mother. That's all we are now, Howard. Father and mother! She's our child: born of you and me. She loves us both. Can't we both have her till she grows up and leaves us—as children do?

BANNING

Father and mother!

(BANNING *rises after a long pause. He has been deeply moved, yet he hesitates. Then he looks at her as she stands there watching him with a calm serenity. He moves slowly to the foot of the stairs. There is a silence.*)

BANNING

(*Calling*)

Polly! Polly!

POLLY
(*Upstairs*)

Yes, papa.

BANNING

Come here.

POLLY

In a minute.

KATRINE

Howard?

BANNING
(*Turning to her quietly*)

Was I nothing in your life?

KATRINE

Oh, yes: Howard.

BANNING

Then why did it all happen?

KATRINE

Maybe you came into my life too early to stay all through. I was a girl. How could I know?

BANNING
(*Lowering his head*)

I thought I was a good husband, as men go.

KATRINE

You would have made some woman very happy. I suppose down deep, Howard, I didn't only want to be taken care of like lots of women we know.

BANNING

Maybe it's an old, old story, after all.

KATRINE

Yes: the world is full of old stories.

BANNING

(*With difficulty*)

I love Polly, Katrine; but——

KATRINE

You think I have some claim?

BANNING

We will let Polly decide which one she will go with.

KATRINE

(*Quickly*)

No!

BANNING

Are you afraid?

KATRINE

It would be cruel of us to shift the decision on her.

BANNING

But it's her life.

KATRINE

Suppose she chooses me?

BANNING

I'm willing to take that risk.

KATRINE

(*Startled*)

You think she might not come with me?

BANNING

That's what we must find out. (*Calling.*) Polly!

KATRINE

Oh, you'd let me see her, wouldn't you? You'd let me hold her in my arms?

BANNING

And if she went with you?

KATRINE

I should always want her to hold her father's hand. I don't want her to lose either of us. All I ask is to let me see her now and then; let me have her part of the time.

BANNING

It can't be that way. She—she must decide!

KATRINE

No, no! My love is greater than that. You've broken me, Howard. Rather than submit her to that, I give in. You have the power here. The courts have given her to you. And we've got to submit, as Anne says, if the stronger can't understand us. Do what your heart says, Howard. I only ask you to be bigger than the law.

(POLLY *comes down the steps slowly and stands there puzzled for a moment, between the two, who gaze at her. Then she goes quietly to* BANNING.)

POLLY

You called me, papa?

BANNING

(*With an effort throughout as he strokes her hair and holds her hand*)

Your mother has come back from a long journey and—she wants you to go with her.

POLLY

Hasn't mama come back home for good?

BANNING

Polly, it's this way; I——

KATRINE

I'll tell her, Howard.

BANNING

I couldn't tell her everything.

KATRINE

(*Calmly*)

She shall know everything in time. And I shall be fair to you.

POLLY

(*Puzzled*)

Papa, I wish you'd tell me what it means.

BANNING

(*Half breaking, as he sits with his face buried in his hands*)

I don't know what it means—I don't know.

POLLY

Do you, mama?

KATRINE

Sometimes I know. But not for very long, dear.

(KATRINE *crosses to* BANNING *and puts her hand tenderly on his shoulder, but he rises and moves away from her gently as she withdraws her hand.*)

BANNING

(*Recovering his self-possession*)

To-morrow your mother will come to you, Polly, and you're to go with her for a while.

KATRINE
(*Overwhelmed*)

Howard!

POLLY

Am I going to live in two places?

KATRINE
(*Hugging her*)

Yes; in both our hearts.

(BANNING *has pressed the push-button.* JOHN *enters from back.*)

BANNING

Is the taxi there?

JOHN

Yes, sir.

BANNING

Mrs. Banning is ready now.

(JOHN *crosses to door which he opens, and stands there waiting.* KATRINE *looks at* BANNING *as his back is turned. Then she kisses* POLLY.)

KATRINE

To-morrow, Polly.

(KATRINE *goes to the chest on which she has left her bag, containing the door-key. She takes this, decides to keep the key, turns and*

looks back at BANNING, *who is now facing her.*)

Thank you, Howard. (*She hesitates, tries to say something but sees the futility*) Good-by. We may need to talk to each other again.

BANNING

About what?

KATRINE

About Polly.

(KATRINE *goes out.* JOHN *closes the door and goes off in back.* BANNING *sinks into the chair again, staring before him.*)

POLLY

Papa; why must I live in two places?

(*She goes to him but he does not answer.*)

[THE CURTAIN FALLS]

THE GROOVE

THE PEOPLE

SARAH GREENWELL
CONSTANCE, *her younger sister*

SCENE

A bedroom at the Greenwells' cottage in a small village, late one June night.

THE GROOVE *

A COZY bedroom in a little cottage is disclosed. It is quaintly furnished. An old wooden bed is at the left projecting from the wall: directly against the opposite wall is a small dressing-table with a dainty flowered covering. Above this hangs a mirror reflecting the two candles now lighted, which are resting amidst the toilet articles. Beyond this there is a broad window through which the moonlight is now streaming. In back a doorway opens into another room. At the foot of the bed is a steamer-trunk full of clothes, with its lid open. On the other side of the bed in back is a large wardrobe. There are some chairs, a what-not, and several old-fashioned pictures on the quietly papered walls; but the room is otherwise scantily furnished. It has, however, the air of unpretentious comfort.

CONSTANCE *is alone. She is about twenty-two, with abundant beauty and an entrancing charm. She is full of vitality, flexible in mood, with the occasional authority of approaching womanhood; but she is essentially youth—with its mingling of unconscious selfishness and spasmodic consideration.*

She has just put on her kimono over her night-gown. As she hums happily she takes down her hair. She

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stops, after a moment, puts her bare feet into her pretty tuffed slippers, goes to the trunk, lifts the tray and takes out a daintily framed photograph. Looking at it half dreamily she slowly crosses to the dressing-table, placing it between the two candles, whose light reveals the photograph of a young man. She kisses it but turns its face down quickly so it can't be seen as she hears the door in back open. SARAH, *her sister, enters.*

SARAH *is ten years older: very plain so far as externals go; rather a quiet personality, in fact, though colored subtly by her humor and generous sympathies. Her hair is down in long braids and she, too, wears her kimono and bedroom slippers.*

Throughout there is a sense of deep personal intimacy brooding over the two as they talk with subdued voices, fearing to disturb their mother in the next room.

SARAH

(*Softly closing the door*)

Mother's asleep now.

CONSTANCE

I thought you were never coming.

SARAH

It's been such an exciting day for her: having you come home and all. (*Going to her.*) *You* must be tired, too.

CONSTANCE

(*Feeling the back of her head*)

I am. I'm all in a knot back here.

SARAH

Let me rub it.

CONSTANCE

(*As* SARAH *rubs her neck*)

Um! I could purr like a pussy cat. What wonderful fingers you have, sister!

SARAH

I do this to mother every time she has one of her bad headaches. She's grown to depend on it.

CONSTANCE

Dear little mother.

SARAH

(*Slipping her arms close down and kissing her*)

Dear little sister.

CONSTANCE

I've looked forward so to this hour alone with you.

SARAH

We haven't had many these last four years, have we?

CONSTANCE

No. (*As* SARAH *stops rubbing and turns her around.*) That's so relaxing.

SARAH

Let me look at you, dear.

CONSTANCE

(*Playfully taking hold of Sarah's braids*)

Wouldn't it be lovely if we could always wear our hair down like this?

SARAH

Why?

CONSTANCE

We both look so much prettier.

SARAH

I didn't know I could be improved upon.

CONSTANCE

Oh, yes, you can. (*They both laugh.*) I mean——

SARAH

All the good looks went to you, didn't they? (CONSTANCE *smiles.*) Mother says John would have been a handsome man if he'd lived.

CONSTANCE

I should like to have had a *real* brother.

SARAH

Instead of so many volunteers?

CONSTANCE

Well, I couldn't help it if the boys liked me.

SARAH

Of course not. You are all unpacked?

(SARAH *goes to trunk and unpacks it during this, hanging the things at intervals in the wardrobe.* CONSTANCE *combs and braids her hair.*)

CONSTANCE

Now, don't you worry about that trunk.

SARAH

But your pretty dresses will all get wrinkled.

CONSTANCE

(*Playfully*)

You are beginning to take charge of me again.

SARAH

You see I haven't changed since you last saw me.

CONSTANCE

A year can't change a fellow much.

SARAH

It's made you more beautiful, Con.

CONSTANCE

(*Glancing covertly toward the photograph*)

That's because——

SARAH

Because you're a woman now. My little sister's a woman!

CONSTANCE
(*Thoughtfully*)

Yes; in some ways only—only—I haven't entirely said good-by to the little sister. (*Impulsively*) Is everything the same here?

SARAH

Just the same. (*Holding up a skirt.*) Goodness, that needs a new braid.

(CONSTANCE *pays no attention to the clothes as she ties small pink ribbons to her braids, looking now and then in the mirror.*)

CONSTANCE

Mother's well, isn't she?

SARAH

Yes; she sleeps so much better, too.

CONSTANCE

What does she do all day?

SARAH

Oh, the days pass somehow.

CONSTANCE

Does she still keep up her church work?

SARAH

That's the only social life we have here.

CONSTANCE

Any other excitement in the village?

SARAH

We've got a new minister.

CONSTANCE

Good looking?

SARAH

Yes, but fifty.

CONSTANCE

Interesting?

SARAH

Mother likes him.

CONSTANCE

(*Turning abruptly to* SARAH)

Sister, you've had awful tough luck with men.

SARAH

(*Laughing and taking it good-naturedly throughout*)

Absent treatment, you mean?

CONSTANCE

Don't you find it terribly unsatisfactory?

(SARAH *waves it aside, but* CONSTANCE *persists with a certain hidden curiosity.*)

Sarah, haven't you ever thought of getting married?

SARAH

I've got imagination, Con, and lots of time to think.

CONSTANCE

Well, why don't you *get* married?

SARAH

(*Casually*)

For the simplest reason in the world: nobody has asked me.

CONSTANCE

Have you encouraged them?

SARAH

(*Simply*)

Nobody's ever been in love with me, Con.

CONSTANCE

Haven't you ever been in love, either?

SARAH

No.

CONSTANCE

(*Amazed*)

And you don't seem a bit sorry?

SARAH

I hate people who pity themselves. Maybe I'm not the marrying sort.

CONSTANCE

You'd make the best wife in the world. You love to take care of people.

SARAH

(*Smiling*)

Is that all a wife's for?

CONSTANCE

(*Wisely*)

Lots of men seem to think so. (*With a sigh*) Maybe you're too good to be married.

SARAH

(*Coming to her and tweaking her good-naturedly*)

Maybe the reason I've had no chance to marry is because I have such an attractive little sister.

CONSTANCE

(*Mischievously*)

Did you send me away to college to avoid the competition?

SARAH

I didn't succeed very well, did I?

CONSTANCE

(*Seriously*)

Sarah, don't you ever get tired of it here? Don't you ever feel like some excitement?

SARAH

(*Evasively*)

You forget we have a new minister.

CONSTANCE

Oh, be serious, sister. You're in outrageously good spirits to-night. You're jesting about the most sacred matters. (*With enthusiasm*) Don't you ever want something thrilling to happen, something that gives you a prickly sensation right down to the toes?

SARAH

That's why I am so happy to-night.

(*After a moment's instinctive hesitation, as* CONSTANCE *leans forward, waiting eagerly,* SARAH *steps towards her mother's door, listens, and then comes close to her sister.*)

What would you say if I told you *I* am going to have an adventure?

CONSTANCE

Who is he?

SARAH

It isn't a man: it's a trip.

CONSTANCE

A trip? Go on, I'm crazy to know. (*Shaking her.*) Go on—go on.

SARAH

I've made all the preparations. I've told no one.

I've only been waiting for you to come back home so you can take my place here with mother.

(CONSTANCE *immediately drops all her banter and gives* SARAH *a frightened, questioning look.*)

Oh, it isn't so dreadful, Con; don't be frightened.

CONSTANCE

(*Slowly*)

How could anybody take your place with mother?

SARAH

You could and only you. (*Smiling.*) It will be a change for mother to talk to a college graduate.

CONSTANCE

(*Dubiously*)

Mother's a dear, but it doesn't need a college education to talk to her.

SARAH

(*Laughing*)

Yet think of all the new subjects she can discuss while I'm away.

CONSTANCE

(*Hardly grasping it*)

You're really going away?

SARAH

Yes. Does it surprise you so?

CONSTANCE

Sort of.

SARAH

(*With naïve enthusiasm throughout*)

It did me, too. But you get used to a surprise when you think and plan over it for a year.

CONSTANCE

(*As she fingers the photograph in thought*)

Sarah, I can't seem to think of you away from here.

SARAH

I'm part of the landscape, eh?

CONSTANCE

Yes. The reliable oak mother's clinging to.

SARAH

I felt kind of timid myself at first.

CONSTANCE

(*Looking at her*)

Why, you're blushing now, Sarah. You're all excited.

SARAH

It thrills me down to the toes, as you said.

CONSTANCE

What are you going to do?

SARAH
(*With delight*)
I'm going to New York to study nursing!

CONSTANCE
(*Disappointed*)
You call that an adventure?

SARAH
(*Happily*)
It seems like it to me.

CONSTANCE
But couldn't you learn nursing here?

SARAH
I've read all the books I could get, but the only place to really learn is in a hospital.

CONSTANCE
Ugh! I hate the thought of it.

SARAH
(*With suppressed excitement.*)
It's the one thing I think I can do; so when I made up my mind I made inquiries. My! how I trembled over that first letter! I felt so daring and reckless. The money question bothered me at first, as I didn't want to touch our little income. But to-day—on the same train that you came—there was a letter from the Nurses' Settlement in New York. They told me

there's a place open where I can study and, by taking charge of some children in the district, I can pay my own way. (*Glowing*) Think of that!

CONSTANCE

(*With a hidden thought*)

When are you going?

SARAH

They'll hold it open two weeks. I'm going to write them to-night that I'll be there the fourteenth. That will be giving you and me a chance for a visit together first.

CONSTANCE

(*Eyeing her closely*)

Sarah, have you told me the real reason you want to go?

SARAH

(*Frankly*)

Why, yes, dear.

CONSTANCE

There's no man you want to get away from?

SARAH

(*Laughing*)

Nonsense; you've got men on the brain. Men don't supply all the romance in the world, silly! This is my romance—just like religion is to mother. It's my adventure—my—I was going to say—my flight.

CONSTANCE
(*Slowly*)

You're doing it because you think every woman ought to have a job?

SARAH
(*Taking her hands and speaking with great simplicity*)

No, no; nothing like that. It's a personal feeling. I suppose what I need is a change—something complete for a while. I'm in a groove, Con, and I've been going along in it for years. Most of the women here are living in grooves, too; only they don't know it. Mother is: she's so comfortable in hers; she simply couldn't stand having a change; it would upset her beyond words. Lots of them are like mother. It's so easy to slip along year after year in your own particular groove. It has its ups and downs, of course; but it's there just the same. I've noticed some of the grooves are all ready for us; our fathers and mothers crease them out and we follow right along. Some of us make them ourselves—maybe I have: like the animals in the ground that have their little runways over which they go day after day. After a while you think of it as part of your life: something you do mechanically because you've always done it. (*Sweetly*) Well, I thought I'd like to get out of my comfortable little groove to see what it would be like. So I made up my mind I'd try it for a year at least.

CONSTANCE
(*Startled*)

A year!

SARAH

Yes; maybe I won't last that long. Some of those who've left come back: the groove is so much easier. But in a year, with what I know now, I'll be a well-qualified nurse and—(*Tenderly*)—maybe perhaps you'll want to be getting married by then and go away —(*As* CONSTANCE *turns aside*) What is it, Con? Con, I do want you to be married some day. What is it, dear? Aren't you glad I told you about my going?

CONSTANCE

(*Restrained*)

Have you told mother?

SARAH

Not yet.

CONSTANCE

Why?

SARAH

I thought it would be easier for mother when she had you already here with her.

CONSTANCE

One of us must stay?

SARAH

(*Simply*)

Of course. We're all she has.

(CONSTANCE *eyes the photograph again, while* SARAH *looks toward her mother's door*

as though listening to hear a sound. There is a pause.)

CONSTANCE

(*Quietly*)

I'm so glad you told me, sister. You ought to have it. I don't see how you've stood it all these years.

SARAH

I have not been unhappy: only I need a change.

CONSTANCE

Is that all you call it?

SARAH

I said it was my romance. But I've waited a long while. (CONSTANCE *lowers her eyes.*) What is it, Con? Say it, dear.

CONSTANCE

(*Softly*)

Mine has come quicker.

SARAH

Your what?

CONSTANCE

My—my romance.

SARAH

You've always had romance. You're beautiful.

CONSTANCE

I mean the real one.

SARAH

(*Beginning to understand*)

The real one?

CONSTANCE

Yes.

(*She hesitates and then slowly gives the photograph to* SARAH, *who gazes at it quietly.*)

SARAH

In love? (CONSTANCE *nods quickly.*) Oh, I've been talking about myself and not about you. And you had this to show me.

CONSTANCE

(*In spite of herself*)

Do you like him?

SARAH

Yes. But I suppose it flatters him.

CONSTANCE

(*Emphatically*)

Not a bit.

SARAH

Is he tall?

CONSTANCE

Over six feet.

SARAH

You always liked tall boys.

CONSTANCE

When I could get them. There's so much more to love.

SARAH

And they all were fond of you.

CONSTANCE

(*In good spirits again, and no longer thinking of* SARAH)

Not the way Paul is.

SARAH

Paul?

CONSTANCE

(*Glowing*)

Paul Lamar. Isn't it a lovely name? He is the most wonderful man I've ever met! He's strong and brilliant and——

SARAH

Yes, yes.

CONSTANCE

He's a civil engineer, like his father. I've known him all winter and we've seen each other every day. He asked me yesterday if—if I would marry him.

SARAH

Marry him?

(*There is a long silence. Then* SARAH, *more serious, lifts* CONSTANCE'S *head and gazes into her eyes.*)

CONSTANCE

I love him, sister, I love him.

SARAH

(*Slowly*)

I believe you do.

CONSTANCE

I couldn't write about it till it happened for sure.

SARAH

(*Simply*)

It must be nice to be loved.

CONSTANCE

It is.

SARAH

But we mustn't be sad about it. You've been in love before.

CONSTANCE

(*Half peevishly*)

I hate to think of that. Besides, I was young. You said yourself I'm a woman now. I've never been in love before: honestly, sis, never really before.

SARAH

I'm not blaming you. (*Still gazing at photograph.*)
Only I want you to be sure of yourself.

CONSTANCE

I am sure this time—very sure.

SARAH

(*Cheerfully*)

Then we must have him down for a visit.

CONSTANCE

You want to look him over?

SARAH

(*Laughing*)

Yes. Could he come now?

CONSTANCE

He said he'd hang on the mail-box.

SARAH

We'll wire him to-morrow.

(*She gives back the photograph to* CONSTANCE, *who places it on the table.*)

I certainly want him down before I go away.

CONSTANCE

(*Troubled*)

Before you go?

SARAH

My being here will help mother get used to him. And then he can come down every once in a while to visit you. When I come back you'll know for sure if your heart has made no mistake.

CONSTANCE

(*Half desperately*)

I tell you I'm sure now.

SARAH

You should give it time.

CONSTANCE

(*Involuntarily*)

You don't know what it is to wait. You've never been in love.

SARAH

(*Simply*)

I know what it is to wait.

CONSTANCE

Forgive me, Sarah.

SARAH

(*Taking her hands again affectionately*)

I haven't had much experience, Con; but I'm your older sister. I've sort of watched without taking part in what goes on. There's love and hate and sorrow here in this little place just like everywhere else.

That's "the ups and downs" I spoke of. And people make mistakes. I want the best there is for you: a home, children, and a full life.

CONSTANCE

Is there any way of knowing beforehand except by what you feel?

SARAH

Feelings are real but not always right. There's no other way of knowing. And people always mean to make their marriage happy. If things go dead wrong afterwards, they *can* be fixed up. (*Impressively*) But don't forget, Con, you *never* can fix up a marriage that isn't just quite right. That was mother's marriage, you know.

CONSTANCE

(*After a long, thoughtful pause*)

A year's a long while when you're young.

SARAH

The years become longer as you grow older—less happens. (*Persuasively*) So don't be impatient, little sister. Remember I want you to be happy that way above all else. So wait till I come back.

CONSTANCE

(*With difficulty*)

Sarah, I haven't told you everything. His father has a government contract to build a huge viaduct in

Brazil. He has offered Paul a chance with him out there. It's a great opportunity. He's so ambitious.

SARAH

He's going?

CONSTANCE

Yes.

SARAH

When does he go?

CONSTANCE

In two months.

SARAH

For how long?

CONSTANCE

(*Slowly*)

Three years.

SARAH

(*After a pause, as though afraid to ask*)

And he has asked you to go with him?

CONSTANCE

Yes.

SARAH

You told him you'd go?

CONSTANCE

I said I would write him after I saw you and mother.

SARAH

(*Very quietly*)

You want to go?

CONSTANCE

I love him.

(*In the silence that follows* SARAH *sits motionless, though her eyes have flashed for a moment with instinctive rebellion which* CONSTANCE *detects.*)

I didn't know about you and your plan to go away.

SARAH

(*Almost inaudibly*)

The groove!

CONSTANCE

(*Kneeling beside her and burying her head in* SARAH'S *lap*)

No, no, Sarah, I won't accept it—I won't. I've always taken everything from you. I won't take this. I'll stay—I'll wait.

(SARAH *looks at her and runs her hand lovingly over* CONSTANCE'S *hair in obvious appreciation of this impulse.*)

SARAH

Let me think a moment.

CONSTANCE

I know all it means. You've counted on it so and—Oh, why isn't mother different!

SARAH

We must accept people as they are.

CONSTANCE

If she only had a life of her own; something to occupy it—some work! She's well—she's able——

SARAH

She feels she's done her duty having us.

CONSTANCE

(*Rebelliously*)

If I ever have a child, I hope I won't feel it must sacrifice for me.

SARAH

Yes, you will: if you're like mother—dependent, with nothing but her home and her children, since father died.

CONSTANCE

It isn't right. (*Quickly*) Can't you go *anyway?* Have somebody come here in your place? Write Cousin Sally or—oh, Sarah; tell mother about it. She'll understand. Tell her how you've counted on it. Let me tell her; let me remind her how you've stayed here with her, year after year——

SARAH

Hush! She'll hear you.

CONSTANCE

I want her to know.

SARAH

(*With quiet firmness*)

Suppose she *didn't* understand? Could we take that risk of hurting her? (CONSTANCE *bows her head.*) It's what *she* feels—that is all we have to go by. She's often said she gave her youth to us.

CONSTANCE

(*Bitterly*)

And you have given yours to her in return.

SARAH

I've done it willingly. One is enough. Mine is nearly gone. (*With resolution*) You sha'n't give yours, Con.

CONSTANCE

But I won't accept it.

SARAH

(*Smiling*)

Yes, you will. Youth does.

CONSTANCE

You didn't.

SARAH

No one else had a claim on me. Somebody loves you.

CONSTANCE

(*With less persistency*)

But, sister, he'll understand.

SARAH

Don't you know me well enough to see that I couldn't let my foolish little plan stand between you and him?

CONSTANCE

I'd blame myself every day—every hour.

SARAH

What for, Con? Because life has brought you something you didn't seek? Something that makes life? It isn't anybody's fault; unless it is mine in making you go away.

CONSTANCE

It wouldn't have happened if I'd stayed here like other girls. Why did you make me go?

SARAH

Because I noticed in our garden that the seeds which fell from a plant never grew up if they took root in the shade of its own leaves. That's why the wind scatters them out into free soil.

CONSTANCE
(*Slowly*)
Yet see what has happened.

SARAH
(*Patting her hand*)
But it *has* happened. So let's look it in the face.

CONSTANCE
It seems all twisted and wrong.

SARAH
I made one mistake, Con; it only just dawned on me. I forgot you could never be contented here when you finally did come back. It must be a small place here after you've had a glimpse of the world.

CONSTANCE
Oh, Sarah, it *is* a small place.

SARAH
(*Smiling*)
When your heart yearns for Brazil.

CONSTANCE
I love you, too, sister; very, very much.

SARAH
But you don't need me to make you happy. (CONSTANCE *protests.*) No; you don't. Yet I can always keep in your heart far away in the corner where you

can come to me if ever you need me. And you will come if—? (CONSTANCE *kisses her hand in acquiescence.*) So you must go with him, if you are sure.

CONSTANCE

But I hate to think of you slipping back into the groove?

SARAH

(*Cheerfully*)

See here, little sister. I don't want you to spoil any of your own joy thinking of me like that. People can make choices; they can go or they can stay if they wish; and when they make their choice they shouldn't rebel at what they haven't taken. Now I feel I must stay here with mother. I've had my foolish dream and—and sometime far off—I may dream of doing it again. But I must stay here now.

CONSTANCE

Oh, Sarah!

SARAH

There's no arguing that in my heart. You see, I'm not pitying myself or being sorry, Con. For a moment, it did seem to put out the light. But I've been looking at it too steadily and it hid the other objects. So promise me you'll be happy about me.

CONSTANCE

Can't I do anything?

SARAH

(*With the intensity of profound conviction*)

Yes. Don't you ever let *your* life slip into a groove!

(CONSTANCE *sits deeply impressed by the thought. After a long pause* SARAH *rises and goes to the dressing-table.*)

I forgot to fill your lamp.

(*She sees the photograph, picks it up, looks at it wonderingly, and then puts it down silently. Then she blows out one of the candles, crosses and pulls down the bed-covers which are flooded by the soft moonlight.*)

You must go to bed. You're tired.

CONSTANCE

I'm not sleepy.

SARAH

I want to see you in bed before I go.

CONSTANCE

Won't you tuck up with me like we used to?

SARAH

We'd talk; and you must get your rest. Come.

CONSTANCE

(*Rising and going to* SARAH)

Oh, sister!

SARAH

(*Impulsively throwing her arms about her and then holding her at arms' length while speaking earnestly*)

We women must learn to see clearly. All the women I know mix their feelings with the facts.

CONSTANCE

You're the finest sister in the world.

SARAH

Nonsense, dear; I'm the only one you have. (*She slips off* CONSTANCE'S *wrapper.*) Come!

CONSTANCE

(*As she slowly gets into the bed*)

But I'm not sleepy.

SARAH

(*As she pulls up the covers*)

Does the moonlight bother you?

CONSTANCE

No.

SARAH

I've left a blanket here. It gets chilly toward morning. Good-night, little woman.

CONSTANCE

Good-night.

(SARAH *leans over and kisses her, then moves her hands over her forehead several times as*

though quieting her. She lingers a moment and then moves slowly to the table. As she lifts the lighted candle she catches a glimpse of her own tired face in the mirror. She is startled for a moment, then turns slowly away, carrying the candle toward the door.)

Sarah?

SARAH

Yes?

CONSTANCE

Do you think there are any grooves in Brazil?

(SARAH *smiles wisely and goes out into their mother's room, closing the door quietly.*)

[CURTAIN FALLS SLOWLY]

A GOOD WOMAN

THE PEOPLE

CORA WARREN.
HAL MERRILL, *a magazine writer.*

SCENE

At Cora Warren's flat. A large city in New York State. Late one winter evening.

A GOOD WOMAN*

A SMALL room in what is a modest but comfortable flat, up several flights of stairs. In back, a door opens on the landing. A snow-lined window may be seen at the right through the pretty lace curtains. Opposite this a door leads off into the other rooms. The furnishings are simple but adequate; wicker chairs, a couch, a small table, carefully selected pictures, some book-shelves, and a large warm rug upon the hardwood floor are conspicuous. A house telephone is on the left wall near the door. There is something seclusive, personal, and intimate about the little room, softly lighted by several shaded wicker-lamps which blend in color with the one-toned patternless wall-paper.

Outside the wind is heard howling as it drives the snow and sleet against the window. After some moments, a bell is heard. CORA WARREN *enters quickly and opens the outer door, admitting* HAL MERRILL. *She closes the door and kisses him.*

CORA WARREN *is a woman of thirty, full of rich feeling, sensitive, impulsive, yet withal clear-visioned and courageous. There is every mark of refinement, culture, and distinction in her speech, with nothing exotic or abnormal in her manner. She is in a pretty negligée.*

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HAL MERRILL *is older, beginning to settle, in fact, but full of mental and physical vigor, in spite of features which, when relaxed, betray a certain careworn expression. He, too, is evidently well-born, and has had, no doubt, many advantages. His heavy overcoat, rubbers, and soft felt hat are wet with the snow.*

CORA

I'm so glad you've come. Why, you're all wet.

HAL

(*Taking off his overcoat*)

I walked uptown.

CORA

(*Playfully admonishing him throughout*)

In this storm? And you knew I was waiting?

HAL

You are always waiting.

CORA

You'll get your death, dear. Give me the coat. I'll hang it over a chair before the gas stove. And your feet—my—my! Soaked?

HAL

No, rubbers.

CORA

So you *did* mind me and wear them.

HAL

Yes. (*Kicking them off.*)

CORA

You must take more care of yourself. What would I do if you were ill? You should have ridden.

HAL

It clears your thoughts to walk with the snow beating in your face.

CORA

(*Detecting a hidden meaning*)

Hal?

HAL

It's good to be here with you again, Cora.

CORA

(*Cheerfully again*)

Yes: it's been so long since yesterday. (*They laugh.*) Now sit down and rest. I've a hot toddy all ready for you.

HAL

Just what I wanted.

CORA

Here's your pipe—old and strong as ever. Did you forget the tobacco?

HAL

No. (*Taking the pipe.*) You always make it seem like home, dearest.

CORA

(*Hurt*)

"Seem"?

HAL

(*Holding her hand during a slight pause*)

You know what I mean.

CORA

(*As she strikes a match and lights the pipe which he has filled*)

How worn and tired you are, dear. I'll be glad when this lawsuit is over. Just relax. Let go. (*She kisses him.*) Dearest.

(CORA *takes up the coat and rubbers, going out quickly in back.*

HAL *stops smoking, the smile disappears, and his head lowers, as he seems overcome with the mood he has been trying to fight back.*

CORA *comes in unobserved with the toddy. She looks at him, shakes her head and then comes, placing her hand on his arm. He starts up from his reverie.*)

What is it, Hal?

HAL

Nothing.

CORA

(*Not believing him*)

Take this, dear.

HAL

Thanks. (*He sips it.*) Um! it's hot, Cora. Just the right amount of sugar, too.

(CORA *watches him questioningly as he sips it slowly. She picks up a couple of sofa cushions and comes over to him, placing them by him, on the floor. She sits on them, waiting for him to speak.*)

HAL

That tastes good.

CORA

You're sure you didn't get chilled?

HAL

I walked rapidly.

CORA

Did anything go wrong with the case?

HAL

(*Patting her*)

What makes you think that?

CORA

Something's worrying you.

HAL

Something did: but it's all settled now.

CORA

So that's why you walked in the storm?

HAL

Yes.

CORA

I'm glad it's settled; only I should like to have helped settle it.

HAL

Cora?

CORA

(*She turns and looks up into his face*)

Yes?

HAL

I wonder how great a test your love for me would stand?

CORA

Could I have given more?

HAL

There *is* something more I must ask.

CORA

(*Puzzled*)

Something more? Tell me, Hal.

HAL

(*Holding her head between his hands*)

Is your love strong enough to accept a silence?

CORA

Aren't there silent places in every love?

HAL

(*With some slight hesitation*)

I mean if—if I should *do* something which I thought best not to explain.

CORA

(*Simply*)

I should accept everything so long as you were honest with me. Only——

HAL

Only what, dear?

CORA

(*Thoughtfully*)

Silence itself is not always honest.

HAL

In this particular matter will you let me be the judge of that?

CORA

A woman in my position must accept.

HAL

Cora!

CORA

(*Quickly*)

Oh, I didn't mean that, Hal; *that* was unworthy of me.

HAL

You know how I love you.

CORA

Yes, yes, dear. Of course I know. I am ashamed of nothing. I'm proud of all we have here in the quiet. But the snow beating against the window has been reminding me all day of the world outside.

HAL

The snow is so free!

CORA

Yes; and you and I are bound by secrecy. That's what hurts: the secrecy.

HAL

(*Stroking her hair*)

If you could only be my wife.

CORA

(*Smiling*)

Just for the freedom it would give me to share everything in the open with you. That's all. Just for the freedom we can't have now.

HAL

But, Cora, even in marriage itself only the happy are free.

CORA

(*Intimating a hidden thought*)

I suppose the most difficult thing for some people is to *give* freedom. (*He nods in understanding.*) Poor Hal! How you have suffered, too, with this tangle we are in.

(*The 'phone rings. They are surprised.*)

Who could that be?

HAL

(*Nervously*)

No one knows your number?

CORA

No. (*The ring is repeated.*)

HAL

(*Dismissing it*)

Central's made a mistake. Don't answer it.

CORA

Everything startles me so these days. (*Dismissing it too.*) Have another toddy?

HAL

Not now.

CORA

Tell me about the case. Is "Boss" McQuinn still going to take his libel suit into court?

HAL

It's called for to-morrow at ten.

CORA

(*Pleased*)

To-morrow! It's come at last, then, after all your months of work. To-morrow. (*With a sigh*) And I can't be there in court to hear you when you testify, or to follow, in the open, each step we've talked over here. That's where my position hurts.

HAL

(*With apparent difficulty throughout*)

Perhaps I sha'n't take the stand against McQuinn, after all.

CORA

You mean it won't be necessary?

HAL

Not exactly that.

CORA

But what you wrote about McQuinn in the Monthly——?

HAL

Every word of my exposure was true.

CORA

But you've said so often the whole defense of the magazine in McQuinn's libel suit against it rests on *your* testimony alone.

HAL

Yes, yes.

CORA

(*Disappointed*)

I see. You mean the Monthly has decided to retract?

HAL

No.

CORA

(*Not quite grasping the significance*)

Is this why you walked with the snow beating in your face?

HAL

(*With feeling*)

This is the silent place! I'm not going to testify in this suit, after all. Please don't question me about it, dear.

CORA

(*Startled*)

Not going to testify?

HAL

(*Earnestly*)

Just trust me, Cora; and let me be silent as to the reason.

CORA

(*Restraining her instinctive impulse to question and placing her hands on his shoulders*)

Whatever is the reason, I know you must have suffered. It is not like you to give up. (*He lowers his eyes.*) You've never asked anything greater of me than this silence.

HAL

(*Deeply moved*)

Perhaps I've never given anything greater, Cora.

(*The 'phone rings again: they look toward it.*)

CORA

(*Slowly*)

Did you give our number to any one?

HAL

(*Nervously*)

No. (*It rings again.*)

CORA

Nobody ever rings here but you.

(*She goes apprehensively to the 'phone in spite of his movement to restrain her.*)

Yes, this is Cora Warren. . . . Who? . . . Mr. McQuinn!!

(*They look at each other. She quickly controls herself and speaks casually.*)

Mr. Merrill? . . . You're mistaken—why should *he* be here? . . . Theres' no need of ringing me up later. (*She hangs up the receiver.*) He laughed, Hal. He *laughed!* (*She goes to him.*) He has found out about you and me!!

HAL

No, no.

CORA

(*Shaken*)

That's what it is. It was the *way* he laughed!

HAL

(*Confused*)

Nonsense.

CORA

(*Slowly grasping the situation*)

For months you've told me McQuinn has been fighting for his political life, desperate over your exposures. He's been doing everything to "get" your witnesses—to "get" something on you. Why, he offered you money—enough to make you independent for life. You refused all that; but, *now,* you're going to do what he wants.

HAL

I'm doing what I want, I tell you; what *I* want.

CORA

That's not so. This investigation has been your absorbing passion for months. You've seen what it means to the hundreds of women and children who have suffered by his exploitations. He's got something on you, something you had to give in to.

HAL

No, no!

CORA

It's you and me, Hal. You ask silence of me because you didn't want to hurt me. It's you and me; you and me.

HAL

No, no!

CORA

(*Slowly*)

Hal, it is that. Answer me, boy. It *is* that—isn't it?

HAL

(*Admitting it, after a futile denial*)

And I didn't want you to know.

CORA

He threatened to tell about our relations together if you testified against him?

HAL

Yes: the blackguard.

CORA

(*Moved*)

And you love me more than——

HAL

(*Tenderly*)

I only did what any man would. (*She lowers her head.*) Dearest, don't take it so hard. I'm glad a chance came to show you how I loved you.

CORA

I knew without this proof, Hal; I knew.

(*She sits with her face buried in her hands. He stands beside her.*)

HAL

McQuinn met me to-night, on the street, alone. He said he knew about our three years—our summer abroad—this place—all. He said he hated to hit a woman, but he knew he was beaten and had to use any weapon he could find. All he asked of me was silence and he would give the same about us—or for me to forget a bit on the stand or muddle my testimony. Of course, I saw what it would mean to the case: but it was the only way to save you. (*He shrugs his shoulders.*) He must have guessed I'd come straight to you. He has ways of finding out 'phone numbers.

I suppose he wanted to frighten you and thus make sure I wouldn't change my mind.

CORA
(*Slowly*)
Did he mention your wife?

HAL
Yes.

CORA
(*Desperately*)
Did you tell him you and she had been separated before you met me? That she didn't love you, that she hated you, yet clung to your name because she knew you wanted freedom to marry me? Did you tell him she wouldn't give you that freedom, because of a few words mumbled over her by an official and because she said she was "a good woman"?

HAL
I did not discuss the matter. It was my wife who told him about us.

CORA
Your wife!

HAL
Yes. That act describes her, doesn't it?

CORA

(*Bitterly*)

And the law gives a woman like that the right to keep you—a woman whose body is dry and her love cold—and it discards me who—oh!

HAL

(*Sarcastically*)

It was my wife's way of disentangling me. She thought I'd rather give you up than this case. She thought I'd sacrifice you. But she didn't know me: she never knew me.

CORA

And she knew me!

HAL

It's done. Now we must forget and go on.

CORA

(*Gazing dully before her*)

What are you going to do now?

HAL

That's what we must think of.

CORA

It will mean you will have to leave the Monthly.

HAL

Yes. They're tired of the suit, anyway. Their advertising has fallen off. (*Putting his arm about her*) We have each other.

CORA

(*Ominously*)

And always we'd fear McQuinn knocking at our door.

HAL

(*Trying to cheer her*)

Nonsense, dear. He'll never bother to come up our stairs.

CORA

How we women hamper you men. (*He protests.*) Yes, we do. Your wife's "respectability" and my——

HAL

Hush, dear. It's not our fault.

CORA

That we love? No. But because we've spoken the whole language of love the world blames us. (*With growing emotion*) If I'd kept my love hidden, worn myself sapless, wasted without expression, then I'd have been "a good woman"! If I'd seen you casually, or if I'd let you come near me, with the flames smoldering, burning us both inside so that there was nothing in our thoughts but fire; nothing of comradeship and beauty that we now have—then I'd still have been "a good woman." But because I let you see my love, because I wasn't a contemptible tease, because I knew all things were equally important in

love, because I gave myself to you, I'm *not* "a good woman"! (*She laughs ironically.*)

HAL

We live in the world, dear.

CORA

And we must go on living. (*With a quick resolution*) But there is no need now of our being cowards!

HAL

Cowards!

CORA

Yes. Up to now, Hal, as I see it, we have not been that. We did what we believed was right, no matter what others may say. But now you and I are thinking of doing what we *know* is wrong; and that is the test of our courage.

HAL

You mean?

CORA

That now we're asking somebody else to pay the price: the hundreds of women and children in this city whom McQuinn would still go on exploiting if you did not go on the stand and drive him out of power.

HAL

(*Losing momentary control*)

It's true; it's true. But how could I ask that of *you?*

CORA

Why not?

HAL

No, no. We must think of ourselves now—ourselves.

CORA

(*Putting her hand on his arm*)

You and I cannot do as many others. We've got to keep right, in each other's eyes, or the world will beat us.

HAL

I've done the hardest thing for you I could, Cora.

CORA

It's not always easy to be a coward, Hal. And that's what I'd also be if I accepted. Somebody else would be paying. Somebody else. That can never be right.

(*She bows her head. There is a long pause. He rises, goes to the window, then paces up and down. The snow is heard freely beating against the pane. Her mind slowly gains control of her emotions and she looks up at him.*)

Hal?

HAL

Yes.

CORA

If you went on the stand to-morrow and told the truth about McQuinn, would your relations with me hurt your statement about him?

HAL

(*Bitterly*)

No. It's only a *woman* whose sex morals can be taken that advantage of in our courts.

CORA

(*With determination*)

Then you must tell the truth.

HAL

(*Desperately*)

And have you hurt? Never!

CORA

I would be hurt far worse if you did not love me enough to do what I ask.

HAL

Cora! (*Comes to her.*) You don't realize what it means.

CORA

(*Calmly*)

I realize that your public usefulness would be destroyed because you wished to protect my reputation. What people think of me matters little now.

HAL

What people think of you means everything to me.

CORA

You fear to have them think me a bad woman?

HAL

Cora!

CORA

Then what difference what they think so long as *we* understand each other?

HAL

They'd forgive a man. But you're a woman. They'd never forgive you—never.

CORA

Nothing will be harder than cowardice.

HAL

(*Going to her*)

I can't do this—I can't. They'd think me a *cad* to sacrifice you like this.

CORA

That thought has made liars and cowards of many men!

HAL

We mustn't be foolish. There's nothing greater in life than what two people feel for each other.

CORA

(*Desperately*)

That's why I am asking this of you. Don't make it harder for me—don't!

HAL

You are thinking of those out in the city; I am thinking only of you.

CORA

But you mustn't.

HAL

You're worth more to me than all of them.

CORA

But you must think of the people.

HAL

The people? That mob any fool can lead with a few catch phrases? That ignorant mass that cheers one day and crucifies the next? What do they really give anybody? I'll tell you. Nothing but ingratitude and scars while you live with immortelles and a monument when you're dead. Why should I sacrifice you for them?

CORA

Hal! You don't know them——

HAL

Oh, yes, I do. They can't sustain their moral attitudes. It's all a periodic fit with them. They shout a lot while the brass band plays and they cheer any fool in the red light. Then they settle back into their old self-righteousness while the McQuinns are always on the job.

CORA

You're unjust. You don't know what you're saying. It's because they *are* ignorant that strong leaders like you should go to them. (*He laughs.*) You must not forget those others who are working with you against McQuinn.

HAL

The Reformers? Huh. I know them, too. I'm sick to death of political reforms and reformers who plant together but reap their fruits separately.

CORA

(*Trying to stop him*)

They're human and——

HAL

Yes; that's it. Damn human! Why, even now they're squabbling over who shall run for Mayor once they put McQuinn out of power. They're fighting, just like the grafters, with all the same petty jealous personalities. Reformers! Would they put *you* on their visiting list even if they knew you sacrificed your reputation for them? With all their political morality do you think they'd dare go against public opinion on private morals? No! They couldn't run for office themselves if they did. They'd think you unclean——

CORA

No, no!

HAL

Yes: just as they think McQuinn unclean. They'd accept your sacrifice. But they'd use it as they use their causes: to ride into power themselves. Reformers! I sha'n't sacrifice you for them. What do they care for you and me?

CORA

But it's not a sacrifice to do what is right.

HAL

Others will try to do what I have failed in. There are always plenty of reformers. I don't want the glory. I've seen the graves of martyrs. No, no. I'll go through with what McQuinn demands just because it's you and me who matter—you and me.

CORA

With McQuinn always waiting at the door. (*The 'phone rings sharply again.*) You see?

HAL

Damn him! Why doesn't he leave us alone?

CORA

We'll never be alone again.

HAL

I'll fix him.

CORA

(*With calm strength*)

He must be answered now as well as later.

HAL

(*As she starts to the 'phone*)

You sha'n't do this.

CORA

I'll not let your work be ruined by my cowardice.

HAL

I tell you I'm through with that work.

CORA

But you're not through with my love! It's my love speaking now for *our* love, which I must keep clean in my own eyes. Our love which the law punishes by denying it freedom to live in the open! Our love which keeps me from being "a good woman"—like your wife!

(*She goes to the 'phone.* HAL, *seeing the futility of further words, sinks back into his chair overcome by what the future holds.*)

Yes. This is Cora Warren. . . . Who wishes to talk to Mr. Merrill? . . . Is this Mr. McQuinn talking? . . . Mr. McQuinn, I'm glad you rang up. . . . I'm fully acquainted with the particulars of the case. . . . Yes, of course, we're going to be sensible. . . . What are you going to do? . . . Thanks for putting it so clearly. I wanted you to say that to *me* also.

We're not at all anxious to have this story come out. . . . No. But Mr. Merrill is going on the stand to-morrow to tell the truth. . . . Yes. . . . And . . . if the story is subsequently published . . . or if he is cross-examined by your lawyers about our relations, *I* shall go on the stand, produce a record that you 'phoned me twice, and corroborate his statement that you tried to blackmail him into silence. . . . You are quite sure you understand? . . . You're sorry for me? . . . Oh, that's all right, Mr. McQuinn. . . . What's that? (*Her voice trails off.*) Yes, I know I'm "a hell of a fine woman."

(*She hangs up the receiver and goes slowly to* HAL.)

You did what you thought best for me. I did what *is* best for you.

HAL

(*Holding her close as she kneels beside him*)

Poor dear, brave girl. He'll publish it. I know him. And then—oh!

CORA

Yes, dearest. But he didn't *laugh* this time!

(*There is a triumphant smile upon her face.*)

[THE CURTAIN FALLS]

THE BLACK TIE

THE PEOPLE

SECRETARY FORD.
NETHA, *his wife.*
STELLA, *their daughter.*
NETTIE, *Mrs. Ford's maid; a mulatto.*
JO, *Nettie's boy.*

SCENE

An upstairs sitting-room at the Fords'. One spring afternoon.

THE BLACK TIE*

THE outlines of the room are simple. A deep bay-window, with delicate sash-curtains, is at one side, looking apparently down on the street below. Near this there is a small desk littered with letters. In back, a door opens off into STELLA'S *room. Another door, into the hallway and stairs without, is directly opposite the window. On the further side of the room, a longer table, filled with magazines and books, supports a telephone. The Oriental rugs, the quiet mahogany furniture, and carefully selected pictures upon the wall betoken means. Several vases contain fresh flowers. The room is cheerfully lighted by the strong sun pouring in the bay-window.*

MR. *and* MRS. FORD *are seen:* MR. FORD, *seated in a deep, comfortable chair, is glancing through the newspapers, looking now and then over at* MRS. FORD, *who is writing at the desk.*

MRS. FORD *is in her late thirties, bien soignée, and enhanced by a gown in the very latest fashion. One senses social authority and a calm outlook on life which nothing fundamentally disturbs.*

FORD *is older, comfortably middle-aged, in fact, yet not devoid of physical attractions. His kind face reveals a sympathetic nature, though he remains essentially a man of large affairs.*

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They are indeed a harmoniously happy couple in the best circumstances, to whom life has been good.

MRS. FORD

(*Signing a letter*)

There, that's answered. I've accepted for the thirtieth at the Lawsons'.

FORD

(*With a sigh*)

All right. Suppose we might as well get it out of our system.

MRS. FORD

What time is it, dear?

FORD

(*Looking at his watch*)

Just two. (*Casually, as he reads the headlines*) Are you going to use the car this afternoon?

MRS. FORD

There's a *thé-dansant* on at the Westertons'. I promised to drop in. Want to come?

FORD

I thought I'd play a few holes of golf. I've had a hard week.

MRS. FORD

Miss Lee is going to be there: she's got some new steps to show us.

FORD

If you don't mind, I prefer to try some old strokes instead.

(NETTIE *enters. She is about thirty, obviously a mulatto, though her heritage is written lightly, if indelibly, upon her black hair and attractive features. Her quiet manner of speech has scarcely the slightest trace of racial accent. Though her face is expressive, there is an inscrutable something about her eyes which would excite the imagination of any one sufficiently interested to consider her more than a maid in the household.*)

NETTIE

(*Quietly*)

I beg pardon.

MRS. FORD

What is it, Nettie?

NETTIE

What dress shall Miss Stella put on?

MRS. FORD

(*Casually*)

Oh, any of her little white ones.

FORD

Tell Miss Stella I'd like to see her.

NETTIE

Yes, Mr. Ford. She's only got to slip on her dress.
(NETTIE *goes out quietly.*)

FORD

You're not going to take Stella to the Westertons'?

MRS. FORD

Why, what a foolish question. (*Smiling.*) She's going to parade.

FORD

(*Putting down his paper*)

Parade? *Our* Stella?

MRS. FORD

(*Speaking casually throughout as she sorts and reads her letters*)

Yes, haven't you noticed her prattling about it? It's to celebrate the conference of Sunday-school teachers or something, I can't quite make out. I think all the different Sunday-schools are sending their children.

FORD

(*Half deprecating*)

Oh, I don't like to have our Stella——

MRS. FORD

Neither do I; but all her little friends are going, so I hadn't the heart to refuse. (*Glancing out the window.*) It's a nice clear day, too, and they don't march far.

FORD

I never thought she was much interested in her Sunday-school: she's always seemed willing enough to take trips with us over the week-ends. Are you sure it is all right?

MRS. FORD

Yes. I telephoned the Thompsons. Jack's going, too. I thought I'd send Nettie down with Stella and she can bring the child back afterwards.

FORD

I want Stella to have a good time, of course. (*Smiling.*) Dear, you don't think she's trying to imitate you?

MRS. FORD

How?

FORD

(*Good-naturedly*)

You *would* march to the Capitol with that Suffrage petition, you know.

(*They laugh as* STELLA *enters, followed by* NETTIE, *who is trying to fasten her dress.*

STELLA *is a sweet, rather precocious child of ten. She has on a beautiful, though simple, white frock with a large pink ribbon belt and hair-bows.*)

STELLA

Oh, daddy! (*She runs and kisses him.*) I'm glad you're home in time to see me.

FORD

My little girl! How beautiful you are!

MRS. FORD

Tom, you'll spoil her.

NETTIE

(*Smiling and showing her affection for* STELLA *throughout*)

Let me finish it, Miss Stella. I couldn't make her wait, Mr. Ford.

FORD

Is that a new dress?

STELLA

(*Pouting*)

No: I wanted a new one for the parade, es—pec—i—ally.

FORD

Goodness! That's a big word for such a little girl.

STELLA

(*Stamping*)

You make me so mad when you call me "little." I'm taller than Jo now, and Nettie always calls him "her big boy." Don't you, Nettie? (NETTIE *smiles.*) Ouch! you stuck me!

NETTIE

I am sorry, Miss Stella.

STELLA

(*Smoothing out her dress*)

This horrid dress! I wish I had a new one.

MRS. FORD

I told you I'd get you some new ones when you went to visit grandma.

STELLA

(*Pouting*)

She won't have a parade, will she?

FORD

I hope not. Es—pec—i—ally, if it's going to make our little girl so cross.

NETTIE

(*Hushing* STELLA)

She isn't cross, Mr. Ford; she's excited about the parade.

MRS. FORD

Nettie, I want you to take Stella down in the car and——

STELLA

(*Disappointed*)

Oh, mama, aren't you going to watch me march?

FORD

Your mother has an engagement.

STELLA
(*Petulantly*)

I hate engagements, I hate them. They always take you away from me.

MRS. FORD
(*Going to* STELLA)

Why, what's come over you to-day, child? (*Kissing her.*) There, dear, you mustn't speak like that. I have sent for the car and I thought Nettie might take her Jo along, too.

STELLA
(*Brightening*)

That will be nice, won't it, Nettie?

NETTIE
(*Pleased*)

I can come fetch my Jo later if——

FORD

No; ride down all together and send the car back for us.

NETTIE

Thank you. Jo is looking forward to the parade so.

FORD
(*Mildly interested and humoring them throughout*)

Jo is going to be in the parade, too?

NETTIE
(*Proudly*)
Yes, Mr. Ford; indeed he is.

STELLA
Nettie's got him a new suit.

FORD
A new suit? How interesting.

NETTIE
Yes, Mr. Ford. This parade is all there is in that big boy's head of mine. You might reckon it was a circus the way he jumps thinking of it.

STELLA
Nettie says she has put a big black tie on Jo so she can see him when he passes.

FORD
(*More interested*)
You're going to watch Jo pass?

NETTIE
(*Beaming*)
Yes, sir.

MRS. FORD
But, Nettie, I'll have to change my gown after you take the children down and——

NETTIE
(*Hesitating*)
You want me to come back?

FORD
(*To* MRS. FORD)
Let Nettie go. *I'll* fasten it.

MRS. FORD
(*Smiling good-naturedly*)
You're a hero, Tom.

NETTIE
But I'll come back if——

MRS. FORD
(*Dismissing it*)
If Marie isn't here, I'll let Mr. Ford. I want you to enjoy the parade.

NETTIE
Thank you. I want so to see Jo march past. He's been waiting ready downstairs since twelve o'clock. Jo's never missed his Sunday-school in over three years. And I reckon I'm not going to let him miss this parade. All the children get a flag with a white cross on it, to keep, he tells me.

STELLA
Oh, mama, Jo looks just lovely! I saw him all ready when I came in.

NETTIE

(*Embarrassed*)

Hush, Miss Stella!

STELLA

But he does. Nettie's put a white duck suit on him so he'll look clean. Didn't you, Nettie? Ask mama if you can't bring Jo up and show her. Please, daddy, let her.

FORD

(*Humoring them*)

Yes, do, Nettie. Bring Jo up. Let's see the little fellow.

NETTIE

Can I, Mrs. Ford?

MRS. FORD

Certainly, if Miss Stella's all ready.

NETTIE

You think there's time?

MRS. FORD

Didn't you say it starts from G Street at two-thirty, Stella?

NETTIE

I think it's at three, Mrs. Ford.

MRS. FORD

Mr. Ford will look it up in the paper, to be sure.

NETTIE

I don't want Jo to be late.

(NETTIE *goes out quietly, pleased at the prospect of showing her boy to them.* MRS. FORD *goes to* STELLA, *who has been standing thoughtfully.*)

MRS. FORD

What is it, Stella?

STELLA

(*Slowly*)

Mama, do you love me like Nettie loves her Jo?

MRS. FORD

(*As* FORD *looks up*)

Stella!

STELLA

Jo's all Nettie thinks of. She's *always* talking about him and making him clothes to wear and——

MRS. FORD

(*Caressing her*)

Nettie's a good girl, but she doesn't love her Jo any more than I love you, darling.

STELLA

But she's going to watch Jo march.

MRS. FORD

All mothers love their children, only their lives are different.

STELLA

(*Persistently*)

Why are they different?

MRS. FORD

They are not born the same.

STELLA

Is there a different stork for some girls?

MRS. FORD

You're too young to understand yet.

STELLA

That's what you always tell me. (*Suddenly*) But would you cry if daddy hadn't let me parade to-day?

MRS. FORD

I'd be sorry, of course, but it wouldn't be something to cry over.

STELLA

Nettie'd cry, wouldn't she, if you didn't let her Jo march?

MRS. FORD

But I have nothing to do with that, dear.

FORD

Stella, come here. (*She goes to him as he puts his arm around her.*) You must never think your mother doesn't love you. When people have a great many things in their lives, these little matters can't mean as much as it does to those who have only a few things to interest them. You see, dear, your mother has so much and Nettie has so little. That's why the parade means more to Nettie.

STELLA

Is that why she's crazy to see her Jo march and mama doesn't want to see me march?

MRS. FORD

Oh, the questions of children.

FORD

Hadn't you better watch out for the car, Stella?

STELLA

All right. Only I wish some one would explain things to me. A girl's got so much to learn.

(STELLA *goes, half-pouting, to the bay-window and looks out.* MRS. FORD *smiles and makes a half-amused gesture to* FORD, *who shrugs his shoulders and resumes reading.* MRS. FORD *glances over at* STELLA *and becomes thoughtful.*)

MRS. FORD

Have you found out the time for sure, Tom? I'd hate to have the children late.

FORD

Yes, here it is. Nettie was right. It's at three.

(*He starts at something he has seen in the paper, motions her to come nearer so* STELLA *won't hear, and points to the paper.* MRS. FORD *takes it, reads it, and then lowers it slowly. They look at each other, apparently moved by what they have read.*)

MRS. FORD

(*Quietly*)

That's too cruel. It can't be true.

FORD

The newspapers are always right with this sort of news.

MRS. FORD

Why don't you telephone and see? You might catch Mr. Grayson.

FORD

(*Getting 'phone book*)

Will he know?

MRS. FORD

He'd know that. (*Shaking her head*) I can't believe it. (*Calling*) Stella.

STELLA

Yes, mama.

MRS. FORD

Get your hat and see if you can put it on yourself nicely.

(STELLA *goes out in back.* FORD *waits till she has gone.*)

FORD

(*At 'phone*)

North 312.

(MRS. FORD *puts the paper down on the chair and comes half anxiously beside him.*)

Hello. . . . Give me Mr. Grayson. . . . Hello, Grayson, this is Ford. Yes, Secretary Ford. . . . I want to ask whether that story in the afternoon paper is true? No: the one about the colored children not being allowed to parade with the white children. . . . I don't want to hear the reason—just if it's true. Oh! . . . That's all. . . . Good-by. (*He hangs up the receiver.*) It's true, Netha.

MRS. FORD

That's too bad.

(*They look at each other as* NETTIE *is heard outside.*)

NETTIE

Come along, Jo; don't be scared. They asked to see you. Come.

(NETTIE *enters holding* JO'S *hand.*) JO *is about eight, and darker than his mother. He has on a white suit with a shiny patent-leather belt and a large black tie.*

They stand there: a look of pride upon NETTIE'S *face as* JO *grins and leans shyly against her. The Fords are nonplussed and stare at each other.*)

Jo is scared. Make a bow and say good-afternoon, Jo.

(JO *grins and draws nearer his mother again.*)

MRS. FORD

(*Trying to find words*)

Good-afternoon, Jo.

NETTIE

(*Smiling*)

I reckon, Mrs. Ford, I'll see him with that black tie on.

MRS. FORD

Yes, yes. Where did you get it?

NETTIE

I've had it for years. It was a scarf which my old mother had from her master's wife before the war. I never could wear it myself somehow, so I cut and sewed it all week for Jo. It is old, but black, somehow don't ever wear out.

FORD
(*To himself*)

Black——

MRS. FORD
(*Nervously*)

How pretty? Isn't it, dear?

FORD
(*Moved by the situation*)

Yes, yes.

NETTIE
(*Beaming proudly throughout*)

I made this here white duck from some old pants of yours you had throwed away, Mr. Ford. They look so well with his face, but they speck so. (*Shaking* Jo *half admonishingly, aside.*) You've gone and got your shoes I shined twice this morning all dirty again. Why did you do that?

(*She kneels quickly and brushes off the shoes as* Jo *smiles. Then she recalls where she is, and rises, embarrassed.*)

Excuse me, Mrs. Ford. This here boy is all I've got in the world. He's a good boy, minds all I say, except once in a while. (Jo *grins.*) I was afraid it would rain to-day. Jo and I have looked forward to this parade so. I tell Jo it's to glorify God that he's marching—'cause if there wasn't no God, Jo couldn't parade to-day.

MRS. FORD
(*With appeal*)

Tom.

FORD
(*After a helpless effort, as he watches* NETTIE *straighten* JO'S *tie*)

Nettie, you're quite sure Jo isn't too tired to march?

NETTIE
(*Proudly*)

Tired? Jo tired? Only this morning he raced Mr. Thompson's boy, Master Jack, off his feet. And Master Jack is some runner, isn't he, Jo? (Jo *grins.*) Jo's got good blood in him, though his father didn't amount to much, and muscle. Put your arm up, Jo. (*He does so.*) When he grows up, he'll be too strong for words. It most breaks my arms now to spank him. (Jo *grins again.*) Hasn't never been sick a day neither and——

FORD
(*Interrupting kindly*)

I was wondering, Nettie, if—if instead of the parade this afternoon, you wouldn't like to take Jo for a long automobile ride in the country—after you took Stella down?

MRS. FORD
(*Quickly*)

Yes, do, Nettie. We won't need the car and——

NETTIE

(*With a certain quiet dignity*)

Thank you, Mrs. Ford. But Jo is going to parade for the glory of God, ain't you, Jo?

FORD

(*Turning aside*)

For the glory of God!

(STELLA *comes running in excitedly with her hat on.*)

STELLA

The car's here. Hurry, Nettie, get your hat on.

NETTIE

Yes, Miss Stella. (*Starting toward door*) Come along, Jo.

FORD

(*At a motion from* MRS. FORD)

Nettie.

STELLA

(*Impatiently*)

Don't stop Nettie, dad; it's getting late and——

FORD

(*With difficulty throughout and trying to soften his words*)

Nettie, I—I am afraid, after all, you had better let Mrs. Ford take Stella down.

STELLA
(*Eagerly*)
You're going with me, mother?

MRS. FORD
(*Glancing at* FORD)
Yes, I'll take you down.

STELLA
But, mama, you promised to let Nettie and Jo go with me, and if they walk down now, they'll be late.

NETTIE
We can hurry, can't we, Jo?

FORD
Nettie, I'm sorry but—very sorry, but I'm afraid you misunderstood about Jo and the parade.

(NETTIE *looks up quickly and instinctively draws* JO *closer to her.*)

The paper says they've changed their plans at the last moment and—and——

MRS. FORD
Don't worry, Nettie. Maybe sometime soon again they'll have a parade just for the little colored children.

NETTIE
(*Not understanding*)
Just for the little colored children? But his teacher said——

FORD

(*With reluctance*)

I know. But to-day's parade is only for the little white children.

NETTIE

(*Slowly*)

For the little white children?

STELLA

They're not going to let Jo march to-day?

FORD

(*Shaking his head slowly*)

Not to-day, Nettie.

NETTIE

(*With a fierce primitive cry of pain*)

Oh!!!

MRS. FORD

You don't care, Nettie, if——

NETTIE

(*Poignantly*)

Don't care?

MRS. FORD

(*Confused*)

I mean—oh!

(*There is a pause as* NETTIE *slowly regains her calm. But an inscrutable look has come*

into her face, as she stares before her, clutching her boy close in her skirt, so that he is almost hidden. The others can say nothing at the poignancy of the grief they have just witnessed.)

STELLA
(*Quietly*)

Dad?

FORD

Yes, Stella.

STELLA

Why can't Jo go?

FORD
(*Hesitates, as he looks at* NETTIE, *still staring inscrutably before her*)

Because——

STELLA

But Jo goes to *his* Sunday-school, too, like I go to mine. And he has never missed a Sunday in three years—Nettie told you. Why won't they let him march? Is there something he has done that he shouldn't, and they are punishing him?

FORD

No, no. It's nothing he has done.

STELLA

Then, why do they punish him?

MRS. FORD

Stella!

STELLA

(*After a pause, going to* JO)

I am sorry, Jo. There are so many things we boys and girls won't know till we grow up. I am sorry you can't parade to-day.

(JO *starts to cry. At the first sound* NETTIE *hushes him imperatively and then, with her former impenetrable calm, speaks kindly to* STELLA.)

NETTIE

Are you ready, Miss Stella?

STELLA

(*Eagerly again*)

Yes; we'd better hurry.

MRS. FORD

I'll take her downtown, Nettie. Wait for me till I get my hat, Stella.

NETTIE

You go down and wait for me, Jo. I'll get your hat for you, Mrs. Ford.

(NETTIE *goes out, without a word, into the room in back, as* STELLA *goes over to* JO *who, standing by the door, looks crestfallen.*)

STELLA

(*Kindly*)

Come along with me, Jo, and see me get in the car. Come. (*Taking his hand.*) I'll tell you all about it when I come back and I'll bring you my flag with the white cross on it, so you can always keep it.

(*The children go out together, hand in hand.* FORD *looks at the paper silently, then throws it aside.*)

MRS. FORD

(*Shaking her head*)

It's almost too big for words, when one sees it like this, isn't it? But I suppose poor little Jo would have to learn, sooner or later, things are different for him.

FORD

(*Bitterly*)

"For the glory of God!" I wonder what would happen if Christ should come back—colored!

MRS. FORD

Tom! You say the most shocking things! It's horrible. But you know *we* can't alter life.

NETTIE

(*Re-entering quietly with the hat and hatpins, which she hands to* MRS. FORD)

Your hat, Mrs. Ford.

MRS. FORD

Thank you, Nettie. (*Putting it on*) I wish I had my hand-mirror. (NETTIE *starts to get one*) Never mind, this will do. Good-by, Tom.

FORD

I'll see you and Stella off.

MRS. FORD

We'd better hurry. She'll be late.

(*They start as though to say something to* NETTIE *but seem at loss for words. Then they go out.*

NETTIE *is left alone. She stands for a second and then, without a change of expression, goes slowly over to the window and pulls aside the curtains. She looks out at the car with* STELLA *in it, as it apparently goes off to the parade.*)

[THE CURTAIN FALLS]

CIRCLES

THE PEOPLE

PROFESSOR JOHN OWEN.
ELIZABETH, *his wife.*
IDA LAWSON, *their married daughter.*

SCENE

The sitting-room at the Owens' in the city. Late one winter evening.

CIRCLES*

A COMFORTABLE sitting-room is disclosed. A door in back opens on a hallway with the stairs leading to the floor below just visible. Another door at the right opens on MRS. OWEN'S *bedroom. A window is at the left near the fireplace with its blazing logs. By this is a large easy-chair close to a table which contains a lighted lamp and some books and magazines. The sofa beyond this, the heavy rugs, the soft curtains, the dull lambrequin on the mantel, supporting the inevitable clock, and the well-worn chairs, all seem to have become part of a room which has gained a homey atmosphere with the years.*

MRS. OWEN *is seated, intently reading a popular novel. The clock strikes the half-hour and she looks up, apparently surprised at the time. She puts down the book after placing a silver paper-cutter in the leaves to mark her place. Then she rises, stares at the fire thoughtfully, as though fascinated by its cheerful flame.*

MRS. OWEN *is nearing fifty. Her manner suggests, somehow, that her repose is not innate, but has been acquired through long schooling: her face, too, in spite of its calm beauty, seems to reflect the quiet that has followed a storm. She is dressed in a loose gown which enhances her natural dignity.*

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As she is standing there, IDA, *her daughter, enters unobserved and halts in the doorway, irresolutely looking at her mother.*

IDA LAWSON *is about thirty; calm, too, like her mother; though one feels it is but the temporary bit upon a nervous, restless spirit. She has a pleasing personality not without obvious physical charm. She is dressed in street clothes with hat and furs.*

After a pause she throws the furs aside. MRS. OWEN, *hearing her, turns in surprise.*

IDA

Mother.

MRS. OWEN

Why, daughter!

IDA

I'm glad you are here.

MRS. OWEN

(*As they kiss*)

We seldom go out now. I was just going to bed.

IDA

Was it father's light I saw in the library?

MRS. OWEN

Yes, he's reading, as usual. He likes a cold room, you know. Didn't you stop?

IDA

No; I came right up. (*Trying to appear casual*) What's he reading?

MRS. OWEN

How should *I* know? (*Seeing* IDA *take off her hat*) Anything the matter?

IDA

I've come to spend the night with you.

MRS. OWEN

Oh, that's nice. It's never been the same here these six years since you and Curtis were married. Is he well?

IDA

Yes.

MRS. OWEN

I've been reading that novel he loaned me. (*Showing it to her.*) He said it was very interesting.

IDA

It bored me to death.

(*There is a pause.*)

MRS. OWEN

Has Curtis gone away on business?

IDA

No.

MRS. OWEN
(*Surprised*)
But if your husband's home——?

IDA
(*Evasively*)
I thought I'd like a change.

MRS. OWEN
I'll tell Frances to air your old room.

IDA
I did when she took up my bag.

MRS. OWEN
How I hated to have you leave that old room of yours. Nothing's been changed since the day of your marriage.

IDA
I was full of wonder then. It will seem strange sleeping there again—with what I know now.

MRS. OWEN
(*Intuitively*)
Is anything the matter?

IDA
No. (*Crossing to the fire.*) My hands are cold.

MRS. OWEN
And little Helen?

IDA

I left her asleep.

MRS. OWEN

Is she quite well again?

IDA

Yes, her cough is all gone.

MRS. OWEN

You were so susceptible to colds, too. You must tell her nurse to be more careful these damp days.

IDA

(*Thoughtfully*)

Helen is like me in many ways, isn't she?

MRS. OWEN

Yes: but I wouldn't worry.

IDA

Were you like *your* mother?

MRS. OWEN

What a funny question.

IDA

(*Curiously*)

But were you?

MRS. OWEN

I'm afraid not: your grandmother was too self-willed. At least that's what my father used to say.

IDA

(*Absently*)

What a circle life is.

MRS. OWEN

(*Gently*)

But you didn't come this time of night to talk of circles, did you?

IDA

No.

MRS. OWEN

Then there *is* something the matter.

IDA

I'll tell you to-morrow.

MRS. OWEN

Why not now?

IDA

(*Trying to dismiss it*)

You're tired and it's late.

MRS. OWEN

(*Pleading quietly*)

We have had so few talks together, Ida.

IDA

But it's—it's always, somehow, been so hard to tell you things.

MRS. OWEN

(*Hurt*)

Hard to tell your own mother?

IDA

It may be naturally hard for me to confide in anybody.

MRS. OWEN

Perhaps, then, I'd better call your father.

IDA

(*In spite of herself*)

He always freezes me so.

MRS. OWEN

Ida!

IDA

Just leave me alone to-night.

MRS. OWEN

I know you don't mean to be unkind.

IDA

Don't mind me—I——

MRS. OWEN

(*Shaking her head*)

I can't make you out; it worries me; for who should know you better than your mother. (IDA *turns away.*) Your father and I both love you so. You've always been everything to us—our only child. *You* know what it is to have an only child, too. (IDA *looks at her in question as* MRS. OWEN *goes to her.*) If little Helen were troubled, would you want her to go to anybody but you? And if she didn't——?

IDA

(*Uncomfortably*)

Don't, mother.

MRS. OWEN

Perhaps you'd better go to bed. I know you've been worried about Helen's cold, but—tell me in the morning if you wish. Good-night, dear.

IDA

I can't sleep now. (*There is a pause. Then she speaks abruptly.*) Mother, I've left Curtis.

MRS. OWEN

(*Startled*)

Left your husband? No, that's not possible.

IDA

Why not? (*Grimly*) Things *are* finished in this world.

MRS. OWEN

Nothing ever is—nothing.

IDA

(*Firmly*)

This is.

MRS. OWEN

(*Starts to protest and then halts*)

That tone of yours makes me shiver. It was the way your grandmother had at times. I heard it in your voice once before: the night you told us you were going to be married.

IDA

When you and father tried to argue me out of it. You didn't want to be left alone here. I remember how determined I felt then, too. Now I've left Curtis. And I've come back to you. Isn't it all funny?

MRS. OWEN

But——

IDA

(*Interrupting*)

It's no use, mother. It won't be as hard as you think. Making up my mind is what has worn me out. Now I've got hold of myself. I see what I must do. I'm going to use my brain for once straight through. I've only followed my impulses before: they've made a fool of me.

MRS. OWEN

Dear, you said yourself you were tired. You can't see clearly. You're not yourself.

IDA

Then who am I?

(MRS. OWEN *looks at her and shakes her head sadly as* JOHN OWEN *enters softly.*

OWEN *is in the early sixties, super-refined, rather precise in enunciation, and he suggests in both manner and appearance a certain coldness of exterior. He is entirely devoid of discernible emotion. He has on eye-glasses attached to a black cord, and wears a smoking-jacket, though he has not taken off his collar or made himself otherwise comfortable.*)

OWEN

Frances informed me you were here, daughter. Why didn't you come in and see me?

IDA

(*Somewhat restrained as they kiss*)

You never like to be disturbed when you are reading.

OWEN

(*Rather didactically*)

Bergson bores me anyway: he is trying to undermine intellect with his emphasis on intuition. There is nothing logical about intuition though it gains its end by leaping over dark places. It's a purely femi-

nine endowment; a defense against man's muscularity; but, on the whole——

MRS. OWEN

(*Interrupting, to his obvious displeasure*)

Ida's come to spend the night.

OWEN

Indeed?

IDA

I suppose you also want to know the reason. You'll have to know later, anyway.

MRS. OWEN

(*Nervously*)

To-morrow, Ida: your father is tired.

OWEN

(*Irritably to* MRS. OWEN)

I am still capable of expressing my own sensations, Elizabeth.

IDA

(*Half to herself*)

And here is where I grew up!

MRS. OWEN

She and Curtis have—Oh, it isn't true!

IDA

I'm not going to live with Curtis any more. I've left him.

OWEN

(*Takes off his glasses and motions with them throughout as he looks at her in growing astonishment*)
Left your husband?

MRS. OWEN

I can't believe it, either.

IDA

Father, I know my own mind. I'm not a child; I'm thirty; I'm married; I'm a mother. I've left my husband for good. I'll never live with him again, never.

OWEN

There's no need to get excited.

IDA

I want you to see quite clearly I mean what I say.

OWEN

(*After a pause*)
I can't believe it. Left your husband? What's the trouble? (*With a logical air as though it were a theorem.*) Sit down and let me have the facts: then we can discuss the matter clearly.

IDA

(*With a touch of emotion*)
Oh, why didn't you simply take me in your arms?

MRS. OWEN
(*To* OWEN)
Don't be unkind to her. This has upset her.

OWEN
(*With some asperity*)
These women! I don't mean to be unkind, Elizabeth. I understand her feelings. But somebody must keep his head. You women fly off so. I cannot give her any advice unless I know the facts.

IDA
I didn't come for *advice.*

OWEN
Then, why did you come?

IDA
I had to go somewhere, didn't I?

MRS. OWEN
(*Comforting her*)
You did quite right to come to those who can help.

IDA
(*With a catch in her voice*)
I don't want *help!*

OWEN
(*With a quiet persistence*)
But misunderstandings happen in the best marriages.

They can generally be straightened out if people will only talk them over.

IDA

Talk, talk! Curtis and I have talked for months. I'm sick to death of talk. I just want to draw myself under a cover and sleep. Oh, to sleep in the dark!

(IDA *has covered her face with her hands. There is a pause as the others seem at a loss, though* OWEN *is a trifle impatient.* MRS. OWEN *finally goes to her.*)

MRS. OWEN

Can't you let your father help you?

OWEN

(*With reserve*)

If she doesn't feel that I am capable——

IDA

(*In a matter-of-fact tone*)

What do you wish to know?

OWEN

You might take a less impersonal tone, daughter. I don't wish to probe.

MRS. OWEN

(*Trying to soothe the situation*)

Don't make it difficult for your father, dear. You know how he hates to show his feelings.

IDA

Since I've come back to you I suppose it's not quite square to be silent.

MRS. OWEN

(*Relieved*)

She'll tell you now, John.

OWEN

Is it more than a misunderstanding?

IDA

It's everything. I wasn't a foolish romantic girl when we married. I didn't expect too much. But he and I can't even be friends.

MRS. OWEN

(*Quickly*)

There is somebody else?

IDA

That's what everybody thinks nowadays when a marriage goes wrong.

MRS. OWEN

(*Enigmatically*)

One generally realizes then.

(IDA *eyes her with an intuitive flash of understanding.*)

OWEN

Are you trying to protect your husband?

IDA

Why should I? I'm no longer proud. The law would say he was guilty.

MRS. OWEN

Oh, the shame!

IDA

(*Quickly*)

But I'm not sure the fault is his. The law doesn't seem to consider temperaments, does it? We're all in one mold. Perhaps *I'm* to blame. Who knows?

MRS. OWEN

(*Shocked*)

Our daughter to blame?

OWEN

What are you saying?

IDA

What few of us who *get* the divorces are willing to acknowledge: our part in the guilt.

OWEN

(*More seriously*)

You're thinking of getting a divorce?

IDA

(*With determination*)

Yes; it's fairer to him.

MRS. OWEN

Oh, Ida, perhaps it may not have to be that: it's so awful.

IDA

I know how unpleasant notoriety is to our family. That's the penalty of father's importance. I thought the fact that Curtis had other women would be enough to make you accept it easily.

(MRS. OWEN *turns away.*)

OWEN

Are you quite sure you *have* thought over what a divorce would mean?

IDA

I never thought of it till it became my personal question. If that's what you have in mind.

OWEN

(*Shaking his head*)

But it's not your question alone. That's my point. Society——

IDA

(*Sharply*)

Father, I can't be sociological.

MRS. OWEN

Then, what about Helen?

IDA

(*Calmly*)

I shall send for her to-morrow.

MRS. OWEN

(*Alarmed*)

You are going to separate her from Curtis?

OWEN

Don't be foolish, Elizabeth; if Ida *has* determined on a divorce and her husband *has* been guilty with other women——

IDA

(*Quickly*)

I wouldn't resort to such a trick.

OWEN

Trick?

IDA

(*Scornfully*)

Do you feel that Helen is mine, just because my husband happened to break the law, the ridiculous law which declares he can't be a good father to Helen because of his episodes?

MRS. OWEN

(*Shocked*)

Episodes? Is that what you call them?

IDA

What else can I call them, when I see they haven't changed or influenced his life one bit? Surely *you* know, father, how unimportant such experiences often may be to a man like Curtis.

OWEN

(*Fundamentally offended*)

I know nothing of the sort! You ought to be ashamed to make such remarks before your mother. If you don't think his episodes mean anything, why are you denying him his right to Helen?

IDA

Because Helen belongs to me, not to him. I carried her alone. He went away during most of my time. My condition offended him. She's mine because Curtis didn't sit by my side when Helen was born; because he didn't suffer through seeing me suffer. All he was willing to give to parenthood was a man's momentary pleasure: I gave pain—such long pain. Why, during all those months he never even warmed me with his hands.

OWEN

(*Shocked*)

What do you know of a man's feelings at such a time?

IDA

I'd like to know about other men. (*She goes impulsively to* MRS. OWEN.) Mother, when *I* was born,

did father——? (MRS. OWEN *is startled.*) Never mind, don't answer. How foolish of me! I might have known. We're wasting time talking—talking. How I hate words!

(*She turns towards the fire again, half absorbed.*)

MRS. OWEN

Don't reproach your father, Ida; he—he was very good to me when I really didn't deserve it.

OWEN

(*Quietly*)

Elizabeth, that's not to the point.

MRS. OWEN

(*With a certain strength*)

It is. Ida thinks because a thing is new that it is right; that you and I have foolish ideas on marriage and divorce. She doesn't know how we——

OWEN

(*Stopping her*)

Elizabeth!

IDA

(*Turning to them desperately*)

Mother, mother; what *do* you both want me to do? What are you both arguing with me this way for? Do you think it easy for me to acknowledge failure, to take up a new life, alone, when I'm not prepared for

it? Oh, why is it we three can't talk together without cutting ourselves with every word? I know it's difficult for you to have me submitted to all that must follow: the talk, the stripping of my private affairs before a court which has no right to know, the newspapers, the headlines, the story played up out of all proportion to its worth. I've thought of all that; but it seems so unimportant now. (*Going to her.*) Does it hurt you so much to have me leave Curtis, when you see he and I haven't a single thing in common?

MRS. OWEN

You have Helen!

OWEN

Yes: have you forgotten your daughter?

MRS. OWEN

(*Taking her hands*)

Oh, Ida, in spite of everything you say, I think divorce is terrible when there is a little child depending on you both.

IDA

(*She looks at the two and then slowly sits down as though stunned*)

Strange! That's why I thought it terrible to stay. You're shocked because I felt Curtis' episodes meant nothing; yet, in spite of your feeling about them, you still ask me to stay with him for Helen's sake!

OWEN
(*Uncomfortably*)
Yes, for the sake of your child.

IDA
Is that a man's point of view?

MRS. OWEN
It is mine, too, Ida.

IDA
You feel as strongly as that!

MRS. OWEN
(*Thinking* IDA *is weakening*)
What's to prevent your making another try together?

OWEN
Wait a while, anyway. Don't be hasty. Take the time to consider. Stay here with us a bit and——

MRS. OWEN
(*Pleading*)
Your father's right: we're older; we've lived; we know. Try to patch things up. Perhaps in time——

IDA
(*With pointed abruptness*)
Mother, have you asked yourself *why* Curtis went outside? *Why* I couldn't hold him? *Why* I did not want to hold him?

MRS. OWEN

Ida!

IDA

It is because—because we both made a terrible mistake—totally misread ourselves. I do not love Curtis. I see I never have loved him.

OWEN

Never loved him? Then, why did you marry him?

IDA

(*Enigmatically*)

Some day I may tell you. I didn't understand *then*. I do now.

MRS. OWEN

Why, you wouldn't even listen to us when we tried to dissuade you against——

IDA

That, too, I didn't understand at the time. (*Slowly*) I must be careful not to make another mistake.

OWEN

Mistake to keep a home for your child with her father?

MRS. OWEN

(*Poignantly*)

You think *that* a mistake?

IDA

(*With a certain desperation as they stand shocked and confused by her words*)

How can I give the child a home when Curtis and I do not love each other? Didn't you ever think of it in that way? I have. That's the real reason I'm leaving. I can't give her a real home with Curtis! I don't want the child to grow up in just a place. She deserves something more than that. She'd be stifled. She couldn't be free. She'd be pressed down by our unhappiness. She'd detect our restlessness. She'd not have the peace her childhood has the right to ask. Curtis and I would differ on everything about her as we'd differ on everything else. We have already. That's what suddenly frightened me after desperately clinging for so many months. I felt the child was being hurt, that she was beginning to *see* our unhappiness. I couldn't stand that. Why, she asked me something to-night before she went to sleep that I had to *lie* about. That would have been the beginning. It came over me I must leave before it was too late. I can't see her joy frozen again by the looks Curtis and I gave each other—looks that made her ask the question. Somehow I felt her whole life might be shaped by those looks. I can't let my little child run that risk. I can't and I won't.

OWEN

(*Who has been trying to get a word in*)

And do you think you alone are capable of supplying what a father has to give?

IDA

I'm thinking that one parent who loves her will be better for Helen than two in the same house who do not love each other!

MRS. OWEN

(*Deeply moved*)

What is she saying?

OWEN

(*Same*)

She doesn't know.

MRS. OWEN

Oh!

IDA

And then afterwards when Helen grows up and Curtis and I are weary, and begin more and more to drop the mask before her, and she sees and understands fully and perhaps loves us both with all her heart! Have I the right to offer her *that* problem? To ask her love to stretch over our severed lives, to let her feel she tied us together? No, no! She'd end by silently reproaching us because we didn't respect her right for love in her home. And all the time, Curtis and I would be desperately trying to keep her near us —because we would be afraid of what would happen to each other when the link was broken. And then one day, maybe, something would snap within her, and she'd go—to what? Oh, how I'd tremble for her if I felt she married to escape her home!

MRS. OWEN

(*Poignantly*)

So *that* was why you married Curtis!

IDA

(*Seeing what she has inadvertently let slip*)

No. No.

MRS. OWEN

It is—it is!

IDA

No!

MRS. OWEN

Oh!

IDA

(*Realizing the situation*)

Well, then: yes, mother: that was why I married Curtis!

OWEN

Ida! (*There is an ominous pause.*)

IDA

I didn't know at the time but I see it now. I never meant to tell you. I didn't mean to hurt you. But now you know why I am leaving my husband. I—I couldn't stand the thought of having my life with him as—as yours has been here.

MRS. OWEN
(*Defensively*)

Our life?

IDA

Oh, I know now what it has been all these years. And I couldn't sit face to face alone with my husband, going on, as you and father have, through the momentum of habit but without love.

OWEN

How dare you say this!

IDA

Isn't it true? Didn't I live here? Didn't I see it all without understanding it? Didn't I *feel* it? (*They are silent.*) Oh, I couldn't go on with Curtis—frozen—eyeing each other in the silences: he with the consciousness I had forgiven him, eating at his heart and not daring to leave: and I tricking myself with the magnanimity I had displayed in forgiving him and not wishing to lessen the beauty of my sacrifice. That sha'n't be my marriage. Helen sha'n't grow up there. No. No.

(*There is a silence.* OWEN *has stared at her tense and silent.* MRS. OWEN *has been cut by each word and finally sobs, as her husband goes to her.*)

MRS. OWEN

That my daughter could say this to us—after all we have done for her!

OWEN

Sh! (*With a cold restraint throughout.*) You'd better go to your room now, Ida.

IDA

(*Diffidently*)

I had to let you see how I felt. You forced it out of me. Helen means everything to me. I am doing what I think is best.

OWEN

(*Restrained*)

That is all one can do. Good-night.

IDA

I have no place to go. You'll let me stay here for a little while—even after what I've said?

OWEN

You are quite sure you will be comfortable here with your mother and me?

IDA

I sha'n't be in the way, shall I?

MRS. OWEN

No, no. You've cut me to the quick. But all we have is yours. Our whole life together has been for you.

(OWEN *gazes into the fire with his back turned to them.*)

IDA

Mother, don't cry. (*She kneels beside* MRS. OWEN *with a burst of feeling.*) Oh, mother, mother.

MRS. OWEN

(*Gathering her in her arms.*)

My child.

IDA

(*After a long silence*)

Oh, mother, if we could only be close.

MRS. OWEN

How could we be when you think I've done you a great wrong?

IDA

Oh, can't we try? We need each other more than ever now.

MRS. OWEN

I've always needed you.

IDA

We're both alone now.

MRS. OWEN

Don't hurt your father: it's not been easy for him to hear what you've just said.

IDA

Father, will you forgive me?

OWEN

(*Without turning*)

I suppose one must forgive even the truth at times.

IDA

Why must you and mother always be so far apart?

MRS. OWEN

Hush, child.

IDA

(*Looking slowly from one to the other*)

If it had brought you two together, all the sacrifice for me might have been worth it.

MRS. OWEN

We did what we thought was best for you. We never expected you would reproach us.

IDA

(*Bowing her head*)

Mother, I've said I was sorry that it slipped out. Can't you ever forgive me?

MRS. OWEN

(*Tenderly*)

Oh, yes; because *you* may have to face the same thing yourself some day.

IDA

The same thing?

MRS. OWEN

Yes: the reproaches of *your* child.

IDA

(*Startled*)

Helen?

MRS. OWEN

Yes.

IDA

(*As she sees* OWEN *turn and eye her*)

Oh, no! No!!

MRS. OWEN

(*Tenderly*)

How do you know she will not reproach you for leaving her father as you have reproached me for staying?

IDA

No, no: that couldn't be!

OWEN

How do you know?

IDA

(*She looks toward him a second and then at her mother*)

That would be terrible. Terrible!!

MRS. OWEN

Yes; terrible if she judges you as you have us.

IDA

(*Losing complete control of herself*)

Oh, mother, I'm miserable. Now I see what I have said to you. Now I know how I hurt you. Forgive me—forgive me. (*Sobbing.*) I was so sure I was right . . . so sure. . . . If she should say such things to me I couldn't stand it. I love her so. Oh, now I shall always fear her reproaches when she grows up.

MRS. OWEN

(*Comforting her and speaking with vision*)

A woman never can understand her mother till she has a child of her own. (*There is a long pause.*) Come, dear. You are worn out. You need sleep. Come. I'll go to your old room with you. (*She urges* IDA *to rise.*) Come. (*She puts her arm about* IDA *and leads her toward the door.*) Don't cry, child. You'll be sick. Hush, dear, for my sake.

(MRS. OWEN *and* IDA *go out in back so close in each other's thoughts that they seem to have forgotten* OWEN *who has stood almost impersonally watching them. As the door closes after them he smiles cynically.*)

OWEN

Huh! These women!

(*He stands there with his hands behind his back, warming them before the fire.*)

[THE CURTAIN FALLS]

THE UNBORN

THE PEOPLE

WILTON BURGESS, *a fashionable children's photographer.*
RHY, *his wife.*
THE WOMAN.

SCENE

At the Burgess' one winter evening about nine o'clock.

THE UNBORN*

A SIMPLE cozy library, on the ground floor of a small house, is disclosed. A door at the back opens on the hallway without. On one side large mahogany folding doors close off the other rooms. A grate with a dull fire is directly opposite. Before this, at right angles, is a large couch on which BURGESS *is reclining. Near it,* RHY, *his wife, sits on a small, low rocker. A shaded lamp and some candles softly light the room, which is furnished in quiet taste: a few pictures with dark frames, rows of books, several tapestry chairs, a piece of statuary, and some ferns are to be observed.*

WILTON BURGESS *is in his early forties, rather good-looking, of no particularly distinguishing features, though his face is a kind one and he is not devoid of a certain sensitiveness in speech and in apperception. He is in a dressing-gown and slippers. His left arm is bandaged at the wrist and at times it seems to pain him.*

RHY, *though the picture of health, has obviously passed the first flush of young womanhood. She is attractive in a quiet way with her soft voice and gentle gestures. At present, however, she seems moody and pensive. She wears a simple negligée and her hair is loosely coiled for comfort.*

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BURGESS *is smoking while thoughtfully looking at* RHY, *who has put down her magazine. A bell is heard.*

BURGESS

Was that the bell?

RHY

No.

BURGESS

Ella's out?

RHY

Yes; motion pictures.

BURGESS

The romance of the poor, eh?

RHY

(*Sententiously*)

Yes.

BURGESS

(*Sitting up*)

What are you thinking of?

RHY

You and me.

BURGESS

Something serious?

RHY

Perhaps.

BURGESS

Out with it.

RHY

Shall I?

BURGESS

(*Relighting his cigar*)

Yes.

RHY

(*Slowly*)

I was realizing it has been a long while since you and I have really sat down quietly together. And I suppose if it hadn't been for the accident yesterday——

BURGESS

Nonsense.

RHY

(*Anxiously*)

Oh, you will be careful crossing the streets. Promise.

BURGESS

(*Feeling his bandaged wrist*)

Don't worry, dear. Lots of people escape automobiles. It's becoming an American instinct.

RHY

Don't jest about it. You jest so much at everything I say. I might almost suspect you're doing it to hide your feelings—if—(*Impulsively*) Oh, you *do* love me just the same, don't you?

BURGESS

(*Puzzled*)

What are you talking of, Rhy?

RHY

Have you been disappointed in me?

BURGESS

Disappointed?

RHY

I have been so happy with you all these ten years—selfishly happy.

BURGESS

We've got along better than most married people, I suppose.

RHY

But I'm afraid of prosperity, somehow.

BURGESS

We've managed to get through the hard days. That's the real test, isn't it?

RHY

(*Doubtfully*)

I'm not sure. When we started in with our little picture gallery, we only had each other. But now that we have everything——

(*She shakes her head slowly.*)

BURGESS

(*Looking at her*)

Have we everything now?

RHY

All we want, I mean.

BURGESS

(*Slowly*)

All *you* want.

RHY

(*With a quick glance, as she rises*)

I was speaking of what we own.

BURGESS

(*Enigmatically*)

So I thought.

RHY

But you were thinking of the—the other thing.

BURGESS

Isn't it a bit natural, sometimes?

RHY
(*Quietly*)
It's generally the woman who——

BURGESS
Men don't say it.

RHY
(*Moved*)
I felt you blaming me these many months; maybe it's been years.

BURGESS
(*Tenderly*)
I've not blamed you, dear. I have only been waiting for you to speak.

RHY
You *have* been disappointed. (*He rises and throws the cigar in the fireplace.*) But we were so poor at the start, Wilton. You agreed with me that if we were to have children we ought first to be able to give them everything.

BURGESS
Yes; I fooled myself, too.

RHY
(*Quickly*)
Do you believe that I——?

BURGESS

Maybe we both have been cowards!

RHY

Wilton!

BURGESS

Yes, afraid to assume the responsibility. (*Seeing she is unhappy*) But don't let's talk of it, dear.

RHY

(*With some difficulty*)

We must; it's always in your thoughts.

BURGESS

(*Coming to her and taking her hands*)

Isn't it ever in yours?

RHY

(*Lowering her eyes*)

That's unkind of you.

BURGESS

Well, anyway, I mustn't hurt you like this. Forgive me! Maybe the accident shook me up a bit.

RHY

(*Dully*)

You won't understand.

BURGESS

Perhaps fear is natural with some women. I don't blame them.

RHY

(*Quickly*)

I'm not afraid of *having* a child. I'm afraid of afterwards: when it faces life—with its innocence, its enthusiasm, its hopes.

BURGESS

Is life so terrible?

RHY

Yes; when one thinks of it.

BURGESS

(*Tenderly*)

Don't you ever feel like giving life, Rhy?

RHY

(*Slowly, as though trying to fathom her intimate feelings*)

Sometimes: yes, sometimes; only—something holds me back. There's something locked: some barrier that needs sweeping away. (*Half desperately*) Oh, if I were only sure of life.

BURGESS

(*Turning away*)

One never is.

RHY

There are moments when one knows everything.

BURGESS

(*Thoughtfully, after a long silence*)

It's been ten years. We're getting older, and soon you——

RHY

(*Lowering her eyes*)

I know.

BURGESS

There shouldn't be too many years between parents and their children. They both lose touch as they grow older.

RHY

(*Shyly*)

But I'm not ready yet. Unless—unless—you——?

BURGESS

Insist?

RHY

(*Half inaudibly*)

Some men do.

BURGESS

(*Soothing her*)

I never will, Rhy. I think it should be a mutual wish.

RHY

(*Close to him*)

You've been a dear. You've always considered me. I realize, when I hear other wives talk, what it means to have a husband like you.

BURGESS

I have never forgotten that it is you who bear the child.

RHY

(*Slowly*)

And in your heart you think I've taken advantage of your—your consideration?

BURGESS

I only know there are millions of mothers!

RHY

(*Gazing thoughtfully before her*)

I wonder how many would have been mothers if they'd known all they had to go through, or if they'd even had my experience bringing up children? It was all left on my shoulders, you know, when mother died.

BURGESS

(*With an unconscious touch of bitterness*)

But I never like to believe it was the care you gave your two little sisters which was to wear out your feeling for children of your own.

RHY

Don't say that.

BURGESS

Well, then: robbed me of my right.

RHY

Your right?

BURGESS

I didn't mean to use that harsh word.

RHY

It's as good as any other to describe your feeling.

BURGESS

Rhy? (*With consideration again.*) What is a husband to do if he loves his wife and wants children and—and finds his house empty?

RHY

Empty? Wilton, I'm here. I love you. Can't *I* be everything to you as you are to me?

BURGESS

It isn't a question of that.

RHY

It is with me. And maybe that's the reason I can't give myself completely to the other.

BURGESS

What do you mean?

RHY

That sometimes a child takes a woman away from her husband.

BURGESS

I see. I see. You don't trust yourself.

RHY

It isn't that. (*Inadvertently*) Only, maybe, I'm not sure of you.

BURGESS

When I want it so?

RHY

(*Defensively*)

Many men do before the child comes. But do you know what it means? Does any man really know beforehand? We've been so close in everything, Wilton; I've shared your work. Every day I've gone to the office with you, just as when we were starting our little shop together; and even now when we have assistants and some one else could do my work. That would all have to be changed, dear.

BURGESS

Maybe I—I would like it to be changed. (*She withdraws her hands from his shoulders as though hurt.*) I never could have been where I am without

you. I realize that. But we have everything, as you say. I suppose it's a masculine instinct, yet I hate to see you work every day with those children, posing them, handling them, understanding them like a born mother. And then always the thought they're not *our* children. They belong to mothers who didn't want them, fathers who didn't want them. Oh, I simply can't see you there any longer, Rhy.

RHY

(*Sharply*)

You want to take my work from me?

BURGESS

No. But——

RHY

(*With feeling*)

All the years I've shared it with you, built it up, helped you. Wasn't it my suggestion that you specialize on children's pictures? Hasn't it all been *my* work as well as yours?

BURGESS

(*Testily*)

Yes, but for what have we worked? Just for ourselves? Is that all there is in life? (*With a quick, intuitive glance*) Rhy! Is *that* why you're afraid of motherhood?

RHY

No, no.

BURGESS

Your work does mean more to you than that.

RHY

(*Defending herself*)

Would you give up your work to be a father?

BURGESS

Don't be absurd. It's not the same with a man.

RHY

It's a choice many women have to face these days.

BURGESS

Some women have both.

RHY

I should want to give everything to my child. I couldn't bear to have anybody else care for it. I know all the risks, all the dangers. I've been through it. I know the incompetence of nurses—nurses to whom we trust those little tender lives. Oh, I'd worry every moment, as I did with my sisters. It's the way I'm made. I'd have to do everything myself.

(*She sinks in the chair and he finally comes to her, very tenderly.*)

BURGESS

It's all right, Rhy. We mustn't let it come between *us*. That's all, girl, dear.

RHY

(*Murmuring, as she kisses his hand*)

Just wait—wait.

(*They stare thoughtfully before them a long while. The bell rings and, as it is repeated, it gradually seems to bring them out of their mood.*)

BURGESS

I was sure I heard the bell——

RHY

(*Drying her eyes*)

Who could it be this time of night?

BURGESS

Possibly a telegram.

RHY

You'd better go.

(*He goes out and she seems puzzled.*)

What a curious feeling—who can it be?

(RHY *goes back as though half-impelled in spite of herself, and listens to the conversation, outside.*)

THE WOMAN

Mr. Burgess?

BURGESS

(*Somewhat gruffly*)

Yes.

THE WOMAN

Please may I see you a moment, inside?

BURGESS

But——

THE WOMAN

(*Poignantly*)

Please—please—only for a moment. Please.

RHY

(*As though moved*)

Let her come in, Wilton.

(BURGESS *returns, followed timidly by* THE WOMAN, *who is middle-aged, poorly dressed, with a thin, pale face and tired eyes.*

She carries a medium-sized package wrapped in a newspaper. She looks up and sees RHY. *There is an embarrassed pause.*)

RHY

(*Kindly*)

Do you wish to see my husband, alone?

THE WOMAN

Your husband? Oh, please, don't go, Mrs. Burgess. Maybe having a lady here with me will help him to understand better.

BURGESS

(*Impatiently*)

But if you've any business, why didn't you come and see me at my office?

THE WOMAN
(*Simply*)
I go to work before your office is open.

BURGESS
I'm always there till after five.

THE WOMAN
I work till six.

RHY
(*Who has been somewhat mysteriously impressed*)
Sit down. You must be tired.

THE WOMAN
(*Sitting on the edge of the chair*)
Thanks.

RHY
(*After a pause*)
You're trembling. Are you cold?

THE WOMAN
No: guess I'm shaky coming to a gentleman's house like this.

RHY
But you must have had a good reason.

THE WOMAN
(*Quickly*)
Oh, I have. (*Turning to* MR. BURGESS) I've come to bring you something what's yours.

BURGESS
(*Surprised*)

Mine?

THE WOMAN
(*Indicating package*)

I left it at the door, like they do children they don't want. I rang the bell and went across the street to see if you'd get it. But you didn't go to the door. I was fraid it would get broken or stolen if I left it there all night. I couldn't leave it, so I thought you'd let me explain.

(*With some slight hesitation* THE WOMAN *nervously unwraps the package. She hands a small framed photograph timidly to* BURGESS, *who is greatly surprised on seeing it.* RHY *watches, puzzled and interested.*)

BURGESS
(*Rather sharply*)

Where did you get this?

THE WOMAN
(*Nervously*)

I can explain. A friend. She gave it to me to give you 'cause she wanted to be sure you'd get it back safe, and 'cause she was afraid if she brought it back herself, you might arrest her.

RHY

What is she saying, Wilton?

BURGESS

Your friend was right. But I don't see how your coming is going to save her.

THE WOMAN

(*Poignantly*)

You wouldn't arrest her when she sent me back with it?

RHY

What is it, Wilton?

THE WOMAN

(*Slowly*)

It's the picture what was stolen from your showcase.

BURGESS

(*Eyeing her*)

If your friend were afraid of arrest, why didn't she send it back by express or destroy it?

THE WOMAN

Destroy *that?* Oh, she couldn't do it. She tried. (*Quickly, as he eyes her suspiciously*) She *told* me she tried.

RHY

Let me see it, Wilton.

(THE WOMAN *takes it from* BURGESS, *gives it a quick glance, and hands it to* RHY, *returning to her seat.*)

RHY

Oh, yes; I remember.

THE WOMAN

(*Her face glowing*)

Ain't he beautiful?

RHY

Yes, I suppose so.

THE WOMAN

(*She speaks as though it were all real, while they listen with increased interest*)

My friend told me the boy used to call for her to take him from the show-case every day, when she went to work, all the winter mornings, when the lights were still on, and every evening when she went home in the dark. She'd heard him calling when she was working, when all the other noises in the shop were trying to drown his voice. And she couldn't just wait till she could stand alone before him. And he'd talk to her and want to be taken out of the cold to his toys and his little bed. And when she'd come again the next morning, he'd tell her he hated being shut up with nobody to pull the covers up or pat him in the night. My friend told me she *had* to do what he asked.

RHY

(*Impressed*)

This little boy?

THE WOMAN
(*Smiling*)

Yes, *her* little boy, as he seemed to be, always calling, day and night, for her to take him from the showcase.

RHY

Strange!

THE WOMAN

She seemed to live only for him. She had a child of her own at last.

RHY

She has no children?

THE WOMAN

She ain't married.

BURGESS

So she broke the glass and stole it, eh?

THE WOMAN

Yes. Every night she'd come back, but people were always near. One night it was raining. She waited till the street was empty. In the dark, nobody heard her break the glass. Then the little boy and her were alone in the rain. She put him close to her so he wouldn't get wet. She ran home. He kept her warm. She could feel him loving at her breast—her dry breast. Oh—(*There is a pause*) Then she put him on a

chair beside her bed and she slept for the first time since she'd seen him.

RHY

(*Tenderly*)

Then why didn't she keep him?

THE WOMAN

Because her room was dirty and small and she was away all day working, and it wasn't no place to keep a child.

BURGESS

Let me have the photograph, Rhy.

(*He takes it and* THE WOMAN *eagerly watches him as he smiles at the picture.*)

Umph! so she wanted you enough to steal you? Well, my little lad, we'll not have you tempting people like that.

(*He lifts it high above him as though intending to break it.*)

THE WOMAN

(*Startled*)

Don't!

BURGESS

(*Putting it down slowly and speaking kindly*)

You stole it yourself.

THE WOMAN

(*Faltering*)

Yes.

BURGESS

I thought so.

RHY

Oh!

THE WOMAN

(*With emotion*)

Don't turn away from me, Mrs. Burgess. I ain't a real thief. I did it because I didn't have what other women had. Because I had so much to give the boy!

(*There is a pause as* THE WOMAN *lowers her eyes and quietly sobs.* BURGESS *watches her as though trying to think what to do.* RHY *gazes at her, then goes slowly to her, putting her hand on* THE WOMAN'S *shoulder.* THE WOMAN *looks up, takes it impulsively, and then lets it go.*)

THE WOMAN

I beg pardon. I ain't used to having people kind to me.

RHY

(*With a certain awe*)

And you work in a shop ten hours a day.

THE WOMAN

Yes. Ten hours.

RHY

Oh, the waste, Wilton—the waste!

BURGESS

Yes; when women have so much motherhood to give and can't or won't.

(RHY *looks at her husband, understanding his implication. Then wiping her eyes, she gazes at* THE WOMAN, *who sits with her head bowed in depression.*)

RHY

Do you love the little boy?

THE WOMAN

Yes.

BURGESS

You talk as though the photograph were something real.

THE WOMAN

He wanted love. It's in his eyes.

BURGESS

That's odd.

RHY

Whose child is it, Wilton?

BURGESS

The Burlingames'. He's gone to the dogs: you know what became of his wife.

THE WOMAN

And they had a beautiful boy like that!

BURGESS
(*Smiling*)

Why, the boy's a young man now, able to take care of himself. This photograph was taken years ago.

THE WOMAN
(*Startled*)

He's grown up?

BURGESS

Yes.

THE WOMAN
(*Poignantly*)

And his curls? Have they cut his curls?

BURGESS

Why, of course.

THE WOMAN
(*As though she had lost everything*)

Oh, I never thought he'd grow up!

(*There seems nothing they can say: they look at each other, deeply moved. Then they watch her as she rises and sighs like one who has had to accept all things in life.*)

I'll be going now if you'll let me.

BURGESS

I'd really forgotten all about this. I didn't even report it to the police. So you've nothing to fear.

THE WOMAN

There ain't much difference in jail and my work except I can walk out at night.

RHY

(*Impulsively*)

Would you like the photograph?

BURGESS

Yes: do take it.

THE WOMAN

(*Refusing it, with difficulty*)

No, no. I couldn't take him back where I live. He seemed to grow sadder there. Maybe he was like the other children. (*They look at her in question.*) They're all like that—the real ones; they like me a little at first, but I feel them grow away from me. I thought he wouldn't because—because he was only make-believe. And he looked like *him*.

RHY

Him?

THE WOMAN

(*Simply*)

Him I was promised to marry. That's what's so hard. He died and I've nothing of him only what's in my thoughts. I wanted a kid so and then he was took off sudden and I was alone. (*Wistfully*) Oh, it's awful not to have something that's your man's; some-

thing you can see living about you—that keeps speakin' to you with his eyes or looks, after he's gone and a woman's left alone——

BURGESS
(*Quietly*)

Would you like if, instead, we put the little boy back in the window?

THE WOMAN
(*Eagerly*)

Oh, would you?

BURGESS

The first thing in the morning. Yes.

THE WOMAN

That will be something when I walk past.

BURGESS

And will you come in and see me to-morrow after your work is finished? I'll wait for you. Maybe we can find something else for you to do, if you wish.

THE WOMAN

Oh, thanks. Thanks. (*Turning to* RHY, *who has stood lost in thought.*) Good-night, Mrs. Burgess.

RHY

Good-night.

THE WOMAN
(*Smiling*)

I thought a mother would help a man to understand.

RHY

A mother!

THE WOMAN

I feel so much happier now. Good-night.

(RHY *stares before her The others go out. She does not move. A curious glow comes into her face. A deep emotion slowly floods a definite thought which has taken possession of her. She half swoons. The outer door closes and* BURGESS *re-enters.*)

RHY

Wilton! Wilton!! (*Goes to him, embracing him eagerly.*) Oh, if anything should happen to you!

BURGESS
(*Not understanding*)

Rhy, what's come over you?

RHY

It might have been yesterday! (*Terrified at the thought*) Oh, it would kill me if an accident or——

BURGESS
(*Trying to quiet her*)

She's upset you, Rhy.

RHY

(*Clutching him close*)

Oh, I never thought of it *that* way! Being left alone without having—oh!

BURGESS

(*Slowly understanding*)

Dearest?

RHY

(*Sobbing hysterically*)

She's broken something in me. She's swept away things——

BURGESS

Don't cry—don't! Little wife.

RHY

(*Almost shyly*)

Dearest, you'll be good to me? If——

(*He kisses her for an answer, and holds her tenderly in his arms.*)

[THE CURTAIN FALLS]

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